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THE JUGGLERS



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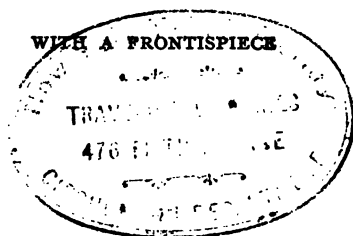
THE JUGGLERS

A Story

BY

MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL

WITH A FRONTISPIECE



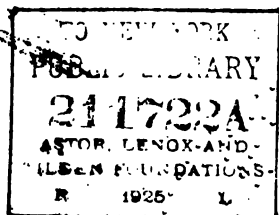
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TO
NELLIE AND ISABEL
WHO HAVE A GENIUS FOR FRIENDSHIP
THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED

TRANSFER FROM C. O. SEP 1925



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THE JUGGLERS

CHAPTER I

DIANE, THE DREAMER

THE lazy blue river and the wide, brown plains of Picardy lay basking in the still splendor of the November afternoon. The mysterious hush of the autumn lay upon the fields and the farmsteads. A flock of herons in a near-by marsh meditated gravely, standing one-legged, and watching the cows kneedeep in the muddy meadows. High in the sunny air, a vulture sailed, majestically evil, watching both the cows and the herons. The world was saying farewell softly to the sunny hours.

The only sound that broke the deep silence was the steady trot of the big Normandy horses on the flinty towpath, as they drew a covered boat along the narrow and shallow stream, and the faint echo of the voices of five persons sitting

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on the roof of the boat in the sunshine. The herons cocked their eyes toward the boat, and listened attentively, though they could not understand a word of these strange, noisy, laughing, weeping, fighting, dancing, talking creatures, called men and women. Sometimes, so the herons thought, these odd beings were a little kind; sometimes they were very cruel, but always they were formidable, and were masters of life and death.

The great question under discussion on the roof of the boat was, where the theatrical company of jugglers and singers should spend the winter. Grandin, the proprietor of the show, a tall, handsome, boastful man, with a big voice like a church organ and a backbone made of brown paper, always gave his opinion first, but was generally overruled by Madame Grandin, also tall, handsome, easily wheedled or bullied, but inexorably truthful. Decisions really rested with the three subordinates, Diane Dorian, the prima donna, Jean Leroux, her partner, and the individual known as François le Bourgeois, juggler.

"I have determined upon Bienville," roared Grandin, in his big, rich voice. "We wintered

there nine years ago, and my lithograph was in some of the best shops in the place."

"Oh, what a lie!" cried Madame Grandin, amiably. "They only put your picture in three butcher shops and the bake shop across the street, and I am sure you paid enough for it. But Bienville is my choice too."

Grandin took this with the utmost good nature. Between his propensity to tell agreeable lies, and Madame Grandin's natural inability to let a lie go uncontradicted, the couple struck a very good average of truth.

The manager and his wife having spoken, the real discussion was now on.

"I should say Bienville," said Jean Leroux, quietly.

He, too, was big—an ugly, resolute man with an indomitable eye, and as honest as the day was long.

He looked at Diane as he spoke. She was dark haired and dark eyed, with a skin milk white in spite of grease paint, and had a vivid, irregular, theatrical beauty, in great contrast to the big, Juno-like manager's wife. Also, she was so slight and thin as to deserve the name of

"Skinny," which was freely applied to her by François, and she had a voice like the flute of Pan. In spite of her soft voice and gently drooping head, Diane had ten times the resolution of the resolute Jean Leroux. She was also the vainest of women, and in order to protect her matchless complexion wore, over her scarlet hood, a transparent veil of a misty grey, through which her eyes shone as the flash of stars is seen through a drifting cloud. Jean Leroux, who frankly adored her, sat at her right, and François, who always laughed at her, sat on the other side. This François had the clear cut, highbred features, the slim hands and feet, that indescribable air of the aristocrat which marks a man who can trace his descent through many lines of greatness, back to those who shone at the court of Philippe le Bel. Yet François was a frowzy person, and his small feet had burst through his shoes; but he had the same glorious and ineffable impudence of his ancestors who bullied their kings and princes.

"What do you say, Diane?" he asked, giving Diane a friendly kick.

"I say Bienville," replied Diane in her lovely

stage voice. "I was born and brought up five miles from Bienville, in a little hole of a house, for my father, the village hatter, and my mother had a hard time to keep body and soul together. When I was a little, little girl, I used to look in clear days toward Bienville where I could see the tall spires of the cathedral making a dark line against the sky, and I used to imagine I could hear the bells on the clear December days, and in the soft summer nights. I yearned with all my heart to go to Bienville on market day, and to see the wonderful things that I had heard of there. My mother and father were always promising me that when they had enough money they would take me to Bienville on a market day, but, poor souls, they never had enough. So then, when they died and I was twelve years old, I was taken far away by my uncle. I never saw Bienville, and tended geese until I was sixteen and begun to sing at the village festivals."

"How interesting!" cried François, who had heard the story forty times before. "When you are prima donna at the Paris Opera, and your noble lineage is acknowledged by the proudest

houses in France, it will be so romantic to hear 'The Tale of the Goose Girl'!"

This was an old joke of François', at which everybody was expected to laugh, but Diane remained sullenly silent. François had told her by way of a gibe that her name, Dorian, was undoubtedly a corruption of the noble name of D'Orian, and the ridiculous story had taken possession of Diane, who was as ambitious as Julius Cæsar, and not without repartee.

"Anyhow," she answered tartly, "it is better to rise from being a goose girl to being a singer in a nice company like this, than —" Diane stopped, but François finished the sentence for her.

"Than to be born in a chateau and come down to being general utility man in a nice, though small, theatrical company. But I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that the fault is in the stars, not in me. God is a great showman, and arranges many highly dramatic events in certain lives. He has a little string, which He calls Life, and when He pulls it, we walk, talk, and sin. And when He cuts that string, we walk, talk, and sin no more. To return to the concrete, how-

ever — I give my voice for Bienville too, because the Bishop is a friend of mine, and so is the major general commanding the district.”

Now, François had never before been known to mention any great people he had ever known in his former life, claiming acquaintance only with organ-grinders, ratcatchers, and the like. So all present pricked up their ears at this.

“When I was a little lad five years old,” continued François, “they wanted to teach me to read, but I did not want to read, so then I was taken into the meadows and shown two big boys, twelve and fourteen years old, who watched the cows, and meanwhile each carried a book which he read every moment he could. One of those boys has become Bishop of Bienville, and the other, I tell you, is a major general commanding. I suppose they will turn up their noses at me, as indeed they should. But Bienville is the place for the winter.”

The three subordinates having spoken, the question of spending the winter in Bienville was considered settled, provided they could get a cheap hall in which to give performances three times a week. The horses were to be sold, as

they always were at the end of a season, and the boat tied up at the quay, because it could not be heated for winter weather.

"I am sorry," said Diane, "that the summer is over, and this is the last time for this year that we shall travel by water."

Diane did not suspect that it was the last time she should ever travel in that way again.

The horses trotted on steadily toward the far-off steeples and roofs of Bienville coming within clear sight. By that time it was nearly dusk, and a great golden, smoky moon hung in the heavens. The boat was stopped on the river bank where the streets of the little town ran down to the waterside. The horses were taken out, rubbed down, and fed, while the Juno-like manager's wife and the future prima donna of the Paris Opera cooked supper. Presently they were all assembled around a little table in the small, stuffy cabin, lighted by a kerosene lamp hung on the beam over their heads. They were very humble people, and poor, but they were not unhappy, and lived in a singular harmony together, in spite of the fact that the three ruling spirits, Diane, Jean Leroux, and François

were all made on a special model. But each had that strange, artistic conscience which begets the iron discipline of the stage. Apart from the stage, François was frankly an outlaw, and submitted to things because there was always a strong and relentless world against him.

When supper was over and everything settled for the night, Grandin and his wife were soon snoring loudly in the little coop which was their room. Diane was not in her little coop, nor was Jean Leroux huddled in his blanket in the large cabin which he shared with François. Both Diane and Jean were sitting on the roof of the cabin watching the moon and stars reflected in the black river, and listening to the sounds brought to them upon the wandering breeze of a merry little town at night. Jean Leroux, a taciturn man, was, as usual, on or off the stage, watching Diane.

"At last I am in Bienville," murmured Diane. "After so many years of longing and yearning! I feel that something will happen to me here, something great and splendid."

"Now, Diane," said Leroux, "don't let François' jokes get into your head as serious things.

Nothing is going to happen here. You sing pretty well, but you have no more chance of being a great opera singer than I have of being an archbishop. You haven't the voice, my dear, for opera at all. You will never get beyond a good music hall artist."

"You are so discouraging, Jean," complained Diane. "You have a fine voice and know how to act too, but you never aspire to anything but a music hall."

"No, and I never mean to," was the reply of the practical Jean. "I wish you had good sense, Diane. But I love you just the same as if you had."

Diane made no reply, and Jean was confirmed in his belief that women were the most obstinate and senseless creatures on earth when once they took a notion into their heads.

"Besides," continued Jean, "you are too old, twenty-six, to begin training for grand opera, and you haven't the money either. At this moment, your capital consists of two hundred and forty-six francs; you told me so yourself."

"Two hundred and sixty-six francs," cried Diane with flashing eyes. "You ought to be

more careful how you talk about such important things, Jean."

"Anyhow," answered Jean gruffly, "for you to try grand opera would be exactly like a cow trying to play the piano."

Diane argued with him angrily for half an hour. She had not the slightest intention or even wish to be a grand opera singer, and knew the absurdity of the situation quite as well as Jean. But having, like all women, great powers of deception, she was carefully concealing the true object of her wishes and ambitions — to go to Paris and become a great music hall artist, a profession which she consistently derided and contemned. The simple creature, man, is no match for the complex creature, woman.

"After all," murmured Diane, "I am in Bien-ville. I have dreamed three times lately of putting on my petticoat wrong side out, and that means that I shall make a great deal of money. And then I have twice dreamed of cooking onions, and that means a splendid lover."

This was more than Jean could stand.

"Very well, Diane," he said, "you had better

go to bed now, and dream of petticoats and love and onions. I am off."

Jean got up and took Diane's hand as she ran nimbly down the short ladder to the deck of the boat. The touch of that hand thrilled poor Jean. His heart yearned over Diane; she was such a fool, and always wanted to do things and to get in places for which she was eterna'ly unfitted, so Jean thought. As a matter of fact, Diane was as practical as Jean, but chose to talk a little wildly.

Meanwhile, Diane in her little coop was sitting on the edge of her bed and looking through the small, square window toward the town. Afar off she heard the echo of a military band playing.

"There is a garrison here," she thought to herself, and then suddenly remembered that the silk petticoat of which she had dreamed was red like the color of the soldiers' trousers, and also that the onions which she had cooked in her dreams were red. Then her mind wandered to Jean. If she should have a splendid lover, how should she get on without Jean? It was he who taught her most that she knew about singing and had a peculiar scowl that he gave her

on the stage when she was getting off the key. Jean evidently did not fit into the plan of the splendid marriage which she was certain to make in Bienville, nor did anything seem to fit without Jean. While Diane was puzzling over this, she slipped into her narrow cot and fell asleep, the laughing stars and grinning moon gazing at her through the little window.

The next morning began the serious business of going into winter quarters at Bienville. It was a busy day for Jean. First, the horses had to be sold. Anybody who flattered Grandin could get horses or anything else out of him, so Jean felt it his duty to go with the manager to the horse mart where the horses fetched a good price.

François, who was very little use in any way, except doing his stage tricks, was with Madame Grandin and Diane, looking for lodgings. Jean had some confidence in Diane's management of money, but this confidence was rudely shattered when he and Grandin met the two ladies at the corner of a street, and were taken to inspect the lodgings which were under consideration for the whole party. First, Jean was dubious about the street, which was much too nice. The sight of

the lodgings confirmed his worst suspicions. There was actually a sitting room in addition to a bedroom for the Grandins, a little kitchen, and beyond it a small white room, with a fireplace, for Diane. Under the roof was a big attic where Jean and François could be accommodated royally. The price, of course, was staggering, one hundred francs the month. For once, however, Jean found himself unable to move Diane or to bully the Grandins.

While they were all in the sitting room arguing at the top of their lungs, Diane's high-pitched, musical voice cutting in every ten seconds, the door opened and in walked François.

"Look here, François," said Jean, "help me to reason with these people. A hundred francs for lodgings, and we haven't even got a hall yet, and don't know whether anybody will come to the performances or not."

"A hundred francs! A bagatelle!" cried François, slapping his hat down on the table. "Do you suppose when I come to a place where the Bishop and the general commanding are my friends, that I intend to stand back for a little money? No, indeed. If we are thrown out of

these luxurious quarters, we can all go to the workhouse anyhow."

"Just look at this!" cried Jean, pointing to the carpet on the floor, and the mirrors on the walls.

"But come and look at my bedroom. I am sure that's plain enough," shrieked Diane.

"It is the best bedroom you ever had in your life," growled Jean.

Then they all trooped back beyond the kitchen to the little white room for Diane. There was one window in it, and it looked across the street directly in the garden of a small, but very nice hotel, much frequented by officers. There was a pavilion enclosed in glass, and at that moment there were officers breakfasting there, with their swords about their legs. As Diane and the rest watched, an orderly rode up leading an officer's horse. Then the officer came out, a handsome young man in a splendid dragoon uniform, and putting on his helmet with its gorgeous red plume waving in the sunny air. He mounted and clattered off, followed by the orderly and also by the eyes of Diane. Jean, looking at her, felt a knife enter his heart. Her eyes had been fixed upon the young officer with

a look of enchantment; her red lips were partly open. She was like a person hypnotized.

"Diane will be a big success with the officers of the garrison," said François, laughing.

"You mean with the corporals," said Jean. "François, you remind me of those soldiers called gentlemen-rankers, gentlemen, that is, who get into the ranks. They always give trouble. You don't belong with us. You ought to go with people of your own kind, who understand your jokes."

"But I can't," responded François, with unabashed good humor. "They have kicked me out long ago."

Then, the discussion about the lodgings began all over again, everybody talking at once, except Diane who remained perfectly silent. When they were talked out, Diane spoke a word.

"I will take the whole apartment myself, if the rest of you don't," she said. "I have two hundred and sixty-six francs of my own."

Jean said no more, and Grandin sent for the landlady, and made the terms, Jean looking after him that he did nothing more wildly foolish than to take the apartment at a hundred francs.

When that business was over, the whole party started out to find a hall suitable for their performances. In this they had extraordinary good luck, finding a large place in the same street, the whole front of glass, and which had been lately vacated as a furniture shop. It would not take much to build a little stage, and the dressing-rooms could be divided off with canvas. Jean then piloted the whole party to the office of the agent, where Diane was put forward to make the plea for the company. The agent was a susceptible person, and Diane's soft eyes and arguments that the place would become better known by having many persons attend it, caused him to make a ridiculously low offer, and it was promptly accepted. On the strength of this, Diane assumed to be a fine business woman, and gave herself great airs in consequence.

When all was complete, the entire arrangements were not so bad. The money received for the horses paid a month's rent in advance and for the erection of the stage. In the latter, both Grandin and Jean helped the workmen and nailed and hammered industriously. François was willing to help too, but rather hindered by

his jokes and stories, which distracted the workmen and kept them laughing when they should have been working.

At the end of three days everything was settled for the winter. The beds and stools and kettles and pans had been brought from the boat, which was tied up for the season. The hall was in readiness, the license was obtained, and the big posters were out announcing three performances a week by the celebrated Grandin troupe of jugglers, singers, and dancers.

On the night of the first performance the hall was so well filled that Grandin was in ecstasies of delight, and Madame Grandin wept with joy.

Across the street, the pavilion was full of young officers, dining. The new place evidently attracted their attention, and presently the whole crowd sallied forth through the garden of the hotel, and across the street. At that moment, François, by Grandin's direction, went out to see if the old woman who was hired to take in the money was doing her duty. As the crowd of laughing young officers crossed the street, François, who had inspirations of genius, ran inside and pulled up the great green shade before

what had once been the shop windows. Within could plainly be seen Diane doing one of her best acts with Jean. She was dressed as a fishwife, her skirts tucked up high, showing a charming pair of ankles and small feet in little wooden shoes, and a delicious white cap such as the fishwomen wear flapped upon her beautiful black hair. The officers raised a shout of laughter and applause and dashed into the little hall, throwing their money at the old woman, and not waiting for change.

François pulled the curtain down, and rushed back of the stage. As the officers came clattering in, they were led by one whom François recognized as the dragoon officer who had fascinated Diane's eyes three days before. This made François nervous, because if the same thing should happen, the act would be ruined. Diane, indeed, had seen the young officer, but the effect was exactly opposite from what François had feared. This, thought Diane, was the meaning of her dream. She sang better than ever before, and no fishwife ever had so dramatic and delightful a quarrel as she had with Jean. The end of the act was that Diane gave Jean a beat-

ing with a broom, at which Jean bellowed, to the great delight of the audience.

This audience, made up wholly of soldiers and working people, except the officers, shouted with laughter, and the young officers made more noise than any one else present, led by the handsome dragoon who had struck Diane's fancy that morning.

Diane was kept smiling and bowing, and blushing under her grease paint, before the row of candles stuck in bottles that represented the footlights. This went on for so long that the next feature on the bill, a juggling act in which Grandin and his wife did miraculous things, was delayed ten minutes. Madame Grandin, who was more nearly without jealousy than any woman François had ever known, sat quite placidly in her tights and short skirts, and wrapped in a shawl, waiting for the hullabaloo to subside. Grandin was torn by rival emotions; joy that Diane had made such a hit, and annoyance that the audience seemed to prefer singing to burning up money and making an egg come out of a pumpkin. Presently, however, Jean ruthlessly lowered the piece of canvas that did

duty for a curtain, and Diane came back palpitating and quivering between laughter and tears. The Grandins then went on, and François, who was not due on the stage for ten minutes, slipped on his outside clothes over his stage costume and quietly dropped into the audience and took his seat by a laughing corporal.

"Who is that young man over there?" whispered François to the corporal.

"Captain, the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, captain of dragoons. I am in his troop."

The corporal, as he said this, made a little motion with his mouth, of which François knew the meaning. It implied that Captain, the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel was a person to be spat upon.

François knew the name well enough; he knew the names of all the great families. He gave the corporal a wink, which was cordially returned, and then went out, and to the back of the stage. He found Diane sitting as if in a dream in the little canvas den which she shared as a dressing-room with Madame Grandin. François, who was to go on in two minutes, began jerking his arms about and bending his

body as if it were made of India rubber, by way of preparation, chatting meanwhile.

"Talking about love and onions and petticoats," he said, "the young officer who led the rest into the hall happens to be a cousin of mine, about three removes, but we are blood relations, just the same, and I think he will end in a worse position than that of a juggler when he keeps sober, and a street vender when he is not quite so sober. He is the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, called Egmont for short. I was just thinking," continued François, making himself into a circle like a snake, "that there are no such things as trifles in this world. I went out just now and pulled up the window shade, and a certain man saw you. The pulling up of that shade was a momentous act, perhaps."

"I knew something splendid would happen in Bienville," murmured Diane. "The Marquis Egmont de St. Angel! What a splendid name! I never had a hand clap from a marquis before."

Then it was time for François to go on the stage. He did his part, which was chiefly acrobatic, so badly that he came near ruining the Grandins' act.

Within the canvas den, Jean was preaching to Diane.

"Look here, Diane," he said, "don't let those young officers turn your head, particularly that handsome one in front. They are not good acquaintances for a girl like you."

Diane turned on him a look as virginal as that of Jeanne d'Arc.

"No man can do me any harm," she said, "except break my heart. I suppose some might do that. And besides, Jean, I am full of ambition. The women who misbehave and drink too much wine, lose their voices very soon and are not respectfully treated by managers. Don't be afraid for me."

"I am not," answered Jean. "At least in the way you think. I am afraid of your breaking your heart and doing something foolish."

"I shan't do anything foolish," promptly answered Diane.

When the Grandins and François finished their act and the curtain was down, even the placid Madame Grandin said a few mildly reproachful words to François for his carelessness which might have caused a bad accident. Grandin,

who was sincerely attached to his wife, was much shaken and nervous and violently angry with François.

"Never mind," answered François coolly to Grandin's invectives, "wives come cheap, but if you are so shaken in the next turn as you are now, your wife will be in a great deal more danger than she was with me. Behave yourself, Grandin, and get the upper hand of your nerves. A juggler who loses his nerve because another juggler hasn't tumbled fair, isn't any good at all and a very dangerous person."

Grandin was much taken aback by this onslaught of François, and could only mumble:

"I don't know why it is, François, that you always get the upper hand of me."

"I know," replied François. "It is because I was born a-horseback and you were born a-footback. That's why."

The second appearance of Diane upon the stage was greeted with greater applause and laughter than ever. Jean, who was a capital low comedian and singer, was scarcely noticed. When the act was over, it had to be repeated, and at the end money was showered upon the

stage. It was all silver, however, except one twenty franc gold piece which was thrown by the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel.

On the whole, the performance was a great success as far as money went, but nobody had got any applause to speak of except Diane.

It takes some time to wash off powder and lamp-black and grease paint, and to get into even the shabbiest clothes, so that the street was almost deserted when the players came out in the quiet autumn night. One person, however, was on watch. This was the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, known as Egmont. He stepped up to Diane and said with a low bow:

"Mademoiselle, will you do me the honor of taking supper with me in the pavilion of the Hotel Metropole?"

"I thank you very much, Monsieur," replied Diane in her flute-like voice, "but I make it a rule always to go home with my friends, Monsieur and Madame Grandin, after the performance."

The Marquis remained silent for a moment, then he said, bowing to Madame Grandin:

"Perhaps your friends will give me the pleasure of their company too."

"It is as they wish," answered Diane. "But I must return home. I cannot stay out late; it affects my voice unfavorably."

The Marquis stared at her as if she were a lunatic; he had never known stage people of this class who refused anything to eat and drink.

Diane then, with Jean, started up the street shepherded by the Grandirs. When they reached the corner, Grandin found his big, melodious voice, and thundered at Diane:

"What do you mean by declining for us to go to supper? I never went to supper with a marquis in my life; it would be worth a hundred francs' advertising!"

François had lagged behind, and was saying to the Marquis,

"Are you Fernand or Victor Egmont de St. Angel?"

"I am Fernand," said the Marquis. "What do you know about my family?"

"Oh, merely that we are cousins."

The Marquis shouted out laughing, while François, rolling up his sleeve, gravely exhibited his arm tattooed with a crest and initials.

"This was done," he said, "when I was a

child, in case I got lost. I have got lost since in the great, mysterious maze of the world, but I have no objection, like that young lady yonder, to go to supper with you, provided you will have a good brand of champagne. Cheap champagne is worse than bad acting."

"Come!" cried the Marquis, "I know that crest. You have indeed got lost! But you shall have champagne at twenty francs the bottle if you will tell me all about that young lady who kicked about so beautifully in her little wooden shoes."

François then slipped his arm within that of the Marquis and the two paraded across the quiet street singing at the top of their voices some of the songs they had heard that evening from the sweet lips of Diane.

Nothing was seen of François that night, but the next morning when Madame Grandin, who added thrift and early rising to her other virtues, was going out to the market at sunrise, she came across François lying drunk on the door-step. Madame Grandin, a good soul, instead of calling her husband or Jean, who would be likely to use François roughly, tiptoed to Diane's door and

the two women very quietly managed to get François, who was a small man, up the stair, on his way to his attic. As they passed Grandin's door, the manager appeared in a very sketchy toilette.

"What's the matter with François?" asked Grandin.

"Drunk," hiccoughed François, thickly, and perfectly happy. "Too much high society. Champagne at twenty francs the bottle, and my cousin, the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, paying for it. Just let me sleep all day, and I will be as sober as a judge by six o'clock."

And this actually happened.

It is a very serious thing for a juggler to get drunk while he is juggling, but François, who had as good artistic conscience as Jean Leroux or anybody else, never attempted his profession unless he were dead sober. That, he was, at six o'clock when he walked into the little sitting room and joined the rest of the party at supper which was cooked by the excellent Madame Grandin and Diane in collaboration.

"Don't be afraid to do the pumpkin act with me to-night, you dear old goose," said François

to Madame Grandin. "I wouldn't risk your precious life for anything. Where would Grandin get as good a wife and as good a partner as you if I should break your neck? And besides, it would break up the show for a fortnight at least, and perhaps ruin the whole season just as Diane is in a fair way to become a *marquise*."

"What do you mean, François?" asked Diane.

"I mean that the young officer who admired you so much was the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, a cousin of mine. We got gloriously drunk together like old Socrates and the boy Alcibiades the time that Socrates came in and caught Alcibiades and a lot of Greek boys drinking, and they swore that Socrates should drink two measures of wine to one of theirs, which he did the whole night through, and in the morning left them all lying about the floor while he went and took a bath and then lectured on the true, the beautiful, and the good in the groves of Parnassus, with all the wisest men in the town at his heels."

"And who was Parnassus?" inquired Grandin in his big voice. "His name sounds like a German university professor."

"That's just what he was," answered François. "One of those *langsam schrecklich* German professors who don't mind having a mob of ragamuffins overrunning the place."

All present gazed with admiration at François, amazed at his learning, as well as his great family connections.

Diane's thoughts were with the Marquis; her face grew rose red as she wondered if the Marquis would be on hand for that night's performance.

CHAPTER II

THE MARQUIS EGMONT OF THE HOLY ANGELS

THE Marquis, known familiarly as Egmont, was at the music hall the next night, not in his splendid dragoon uniform, nor yet in evening dress, but in ordinary clothes which suggested the notion of a disguise on Egmont's part, to François.

Evidently, the company as a whole, and Diane in particular, had made a great hit, for the former furniture shop was packed with persons. François went through his juggling and his tricks with the Grandins without the slightest nervousness. Not so, Diane. She began to give signs of what is dangerous and even fatal to an actress — self-consciousness. No one noticed it except Jean, who saw everything with the sharp-sightedness of love.

When the performance was over, and the hall closing for the night, the old woman who took in the money at the door handed a note to Diane, who slipped it into her breast. When

she got home and was alone in her little white room, she took the note out and read it. Many notes of the kind had Diane received in her short theatrical career, chiefly from young shopmen and susceptible lawyers' clerks and the like, but this was from a marquis, and written upon beautiful paper. It was very respectful in tone, and asked Diane why she had been so cruel the night before, and what evening would she honor Captain, the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel with her company at supper. The foolish Diane kissed the note and slept with it under her pillow.

The next morning about ten o'clock, Diane went out on a shopping expedition in the streets of Bienville. She was one of those women who have an instinctive knowledge of how to make the best of herself. She adopted a demure style of dress, a trim little black gown and large black hat and a thin black veil, all of which gave her a nun-like appearance. When she raised her eyes, however, there was nothing of the nun about Diane.

She walked rapidly along the bustling streets of the town, and looked like a pretty governess somewhat alarmed at being out alone. In truth,

Diane had been out in the world alone since her seventeenth year, and knew perfectly well how to take care of herself. She went into a paper shop to buy some writing paper elegant enough to reply to the Marquis's note. As she walked out of the shop, she came face to face with the Marquis swinging along in his dashing uniform, and carrying his sabre in his arm. He smiled brilliantly at Diane and took off his glittering helmet with its red plumes, and bowed profoundly to her, but Diane, whose face became scarlet as the dragoon's plumes, turned and ran as fast as she could, and was lost to sight, diving into a narrow and devious street. She heard footsteps behind her and kept her head down, thinking it was the Marquis, but the voice in her ear was that of Jean.

"That man means mischief as certainly as you live, Diane," said Jean, who had a brusqueness and common sense sometimes most painful and uncompromising.

Diane stopped under an archway, dark even in the bright autumn morning.

"I don't know what he means," she said, "but neither he nor any other man can do me

any harm. In the first place, I am by nature a modest girl, you know that, Jean. Then, you laugh at my ambitions. Very well; when the time comes that the newspaper reporters are digging into my past, they won't find anything disgraceful, upon that I am determined. If the Marquis wants to marry me, I shall marry him. But the only way he can reach me is through the church door."

Jean laughed a hearty, mirthful laugh.

"I believe you," he said, "and as you always were the most persevering and most determined creature that ever lived, I think that you will stick to what you say. But neither this marquis nor any other marquis will ever want to marry you. As for this fellow, he is a scoundrel. I have heard it in the last twenty-four hours, and I see it for myself."

"You are so prejudiced, Jean," complained Diane. "However, I will show you the note that I shall write him, so that you can point out any mistakes in spelling I may make."

"François is the man for spelling," answered Jean.

Diane thought so too, so after writing her

little note first on a piece of wrapping paper — Diane was nothing if not economical — she showed it to François, who corrected two mistakes. It was very short, simply saying that Mademoiselle Dorian thanked the Marquis for his compliment, but that she did not accept invitations to supper.

“But I wish, Skinny,” said François, “you would go with him. He will be certain to say or do something impudent, and that will disgust you, and there will be an end of it. But you are acting, my dear, like a finished coquette.”

This Diane violently denied, as it was the truth and she did not wish it known.

The Marquis continued to haunt the little hall every night, and the effect upon Diane’s acting was not good, especially in a little love scene she had with Jean.

After a week of this, one night when the performance was over and they were all preparing to go home, Jean spoke to Diane in her little canvas den of a dressing-room.

“Something is the matter. Your acting isn’t improved, Diane,” said Jean, “by your eyes wandering over the audience, and shrinking

away from me when you ought to throw yourself in my arms. If you go on like this, you will never get to Paris even as a music hall artist. Your acting won't be worth your railway fare, third class."

"I know it," answered Diane with pale lips. "But while I am dressing I am asking myself all the time, 'Will the Marquis be in front?' If he isn't there, there doesn't seem to me as if there were anyone in the hall; then as soon as he comes in he seems to fill the hall and to be on the stage with me. Pity me, Jean!"

"I do," answered Jean, "from the bottom of my heart, and I have a little pity for myself, too. But, Diane, where is your courage, your resolution, of which you are always boasting?"

"It is here," answered Diane, laying her hand upon her heart. "It is that which keeps me away from him, which drags me to my room when I want to go with the Marquis. It is that which makes me a victor every hour, for I am forever struggling to keep away from him, and I *have* kept away from him. But when he comes where I am — oh, Jean!"

Diane sat down on the rough box which held

her stage wardrobe, consisting of two costumes, and wept plentifully. Jean kneeled by her.

"But you won't be a coward, Diane," he cried desperately. "Keep on struggling and fighting. The fellow is a scoundrel, that I assure you. I know the kind of a fight you are making. I have had the same kind ever since I knew you. Think what it is to me to take you in my arms and then to throw you off as we do on the stage every night. Think what it is to act when one feels it."

Jean stopped. The love of one man matters little to a woman who is desperately in love with another, but Diane, out of the depths of her own agony, looked into Jean's eyes and realized that some one else could suffer besides herself. They both forgot that François was changing his clothes on the other side of the piece of canvas and could hear every word. Suddenly François' head appeared above the canvas partition which was only about six feet high, and with a convenient upturned bucket François, who was a short man, could mount and see over into the next canvas den.

"That's the way it is," cried François, laugh-

ing. "You know the Spanish proverb, 'I am dying for you and you are dying for him who is dying for someone else.' I haven't even the privilege of taking you in my arms, Diane, on the stage, like Jean. This is a cursed world!"

There can be no secrets in a travelling company of five persons between whom there is seldom more than a canvas partition.

Diane did not stop crying, and Jean still knelt on the ground looking at her. Presently he glanced up at François' grinning face, and cried:

"François, because you never loved a woman, you don't know what it means, to see her wretched and foolish and crying her eyes out for a worthless dog, as Diane is doing now."

"True, true, true!" laughed François, "I have done many foolish things in my life, but I never intend to love any woman, especially Diane. Ha, ha! Here, take this stage dagger and kill yourselves like a couple of lovers in grand opera. It is not much of a weapon, but it will do the job. It is the only way out of a three-cornered love affair."

"François, you are so unfeeling," said Diane, angrily, and drying her eyes.

As the stage dagger came clattering over the canvas, François got down off his bucket on the other side.

"Never loved a woman!" muttered François to himself. He had a habit common to imaginative persons, of talking to himself when he was under a great stress. "There they go off together. I wonder if they have taken the dagger with them."

He sat motionless, gazing into the dingy little unframed mirror hung against the canvas, apparently fascinated by the glare in his own eyes.

"Don't stand on that bucket again, François, my man," he said to himself between his clenched teeth. "If the dagger is on the floor — It is a clumsy thing, a blunt and horrid weapon to use on one's self."

In vain he tried to hold himself by his own glance into the mirror, as one man tries to cow another by his gaze. He backed away until his foot struck the overturned bucket; then he jumped up and glanced over into Diane's dressing-room. No, there was no dagger on the floor; there was nothing but the box, which was locked,

and a bit of a mirror, a towel and soap, and a comb and brush. As François looked, his eyes lost their wild expression. He breathed freely like a man released from the grip of a wild beast. He even laughed, and in his excess of relief, turned a double somersault on the floor, and putting on his shabby coat and shabbier hat, went off whistling gaily. As he came out of the narrow, black alley entrance which did duty for a stage entrance, he saw the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel stepping across the street toward the Hotel Metropole. He had gone through his usual performance of watching Diane go home.

"Halloo! my dear Egmont of the Holy Angels," cried François, "I will take supper with you to-night if you will ask me, or if you will pay for the supper, I won't even stand on the asking."

"Come along, then," answered the Marquis. He was willing to pay for François' supper in order to talk about Diane.

The Marquis got a table in an alcove of the pavilion so he could talk freely. The contrast between the two men was extreme — the Marquis, in his splendid dragoon uniform, for he had just come from a reception at the house of

the general commanding, and François in his shabby clothes. The waiters, who knew that François was a juggler at a cheap place, nevertheless treated him with an odd kind of respect due to a note of command which his voice had never wholly lost.

"I had to go to a dull reception at the house of the general," said the Marquis when he and François were seated at a little table, "and got away as soon as I could. What a bore are those pink and white girls, clinging to their mothers' skirts and as ignorant as children! They are quite colorless after Mademoiselle Diane."

"Diane isn't ignorant. She could not well be," replied François, sipping his wine. "But in mind she has an eternal innocence. There is a great difference between the two things—ignorance and innocence."

"I don't know about that," replied the Marquis, whose mind was low, and who was not so intelligent as François. "That capricious little music hall devil has given me more trouble to bring around to my way of thinking than half the girls I have met to-night. But she keeps me dancing after her, damn her, the little darling!"

François laughed at this, and laughed still more when the Marquis inquired anxiously:

"I think it is that great, hulking fellow who sings and dances with her that frightens her. Perhaps she is in love with him; women are such crazy creatures!"

"Oh, no," cried François, beginning to attack the supper which the waiter had brought, "Diane is not in love with Jean, nor with me either, strange to say, although I was born both handsome and rich."

The Marquis pushed his chair back a little, and the waiter being out of hearing, brought his fist down on the table.

"The infernal, proud, presumptuous little devil probably thinks she can marry me! Very well, let us see who will beat at that game. Just look at this impudent note she wrote me."

The Marquis tore from his breast Diane's cool little note, the only one he had ever had from her.

"She doesn't go out to supper after the performance. She remains with Monsieur and Madame Grandin, her friends."

The Marquis howled with laughter at this, and then kept on.

"And she a singer and dancer in the cheapest music hall in this dull old town of Bienville! Oh, she has got it into her silly head that by holding off she can become a marquise, but she won't."

"But you are carrying around her note in your breast pocket," suggested François.

"Oh, yes, I am fool enough for that," calmly admitted the Marquis, putting the note back in his breast pocket and drawing his chair up to the table. "I can feel it, I can feel it there, although it is only a bit of paper. Who was her father, François?"

"The village hatter," replied François, "like the father of Adrienne Lecouvreur. That was her prosperous period, when she enjoyed the advantages of a polite education at the village school. Then her parents died, and she was taken to the house of an uncle who owned three acres of ground, and Diane worked in the cabbage garden and tended geese."

"And where did she learn to sing, and all those devilish, captivating little ways of hers on the stage?"

"From Nature, the mighty mother of us all.

She took some singing lessons from the village teacher, and used to sing at country fairs after she was sixteen. Then, a couple of years ago, we found her and took her into our company. Singing on the stage was taught her by Jean Leroux, her partner, and I taught her something of acting and little stage tricks, but I must say she was a very apt pupil. She has got it into her head to go to Paris and study for the grand opera, but she has no grand opera voice, and has two hundred and sixty-six francs to pay her expenses." For Diane had palmed off the grand opera story on François as well as on Jean, when really her mind was set upon a big music hall.

"Everything that you tell me," said the Marquis, "shows how admirably unfitted this wide mouthed, skinny girl is to become the Marquise Egmont de St. Angel."

"You have hit upon her name," cried François, laughing, "for we call her Skinny. Our little Skinny a marquise! And your title is worth at least two million francs in the open market. As for yourself, I may, with the frankness of a relative, say you would be dear at two hundred francs."

"Has anybody ever told you that you were extremely impudent, M. le Bourgeois, as you call yourself?"

"Occasionally," replied François. "Here, waiter." The waiter came from a distance. "Take this chicken away," said François, — "it was hatched during the First Empire, I think, — and bring us one that isn't old enough for military service."

The Marquis rambled on, admiring and cursing Diane all through the supper.

When François got home an hour later and passed Diane's door, he saw a thread of light under it, and the door opened gently, showing Diane's pale, dispirited face. She knew well enough where François had been; nobody except the Marquis had so far asked him to supper.

"Yes," said François in a whisper, answering the question in poor Diane's eyes, "I have been to supper with him. It always raises me in my own esteem, for I see that I, François le Bourgeois, born in a chateau, and now juggler and acrobat when I am sober enough, am a far more respectable character than the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel; he has no more brains than my

shoe, and is the handsomest young officer I ever saw. I am ashamed of him as a relative."

Diane slammed the door angrily in François' face.

The days and the weeks crept on, and the performances in the ex-furniture shop maintained and even increased their popularity. Diane could have had supper every evening with an officer or with a young advocate or any of the gay dogs who are found in every town, but Diane, being a shrewd little person, concluded that it was worth more as an advertisement to decline these offers than to accept them. Soon it became the subject of numerous wagers among the gilded youth of Bienville as to who should first have the triumph of entertaining Diane at supper. Presently the wagers were changed; it was a question whether any of them could succeed in this commendable project.

This sudden popularity of Diane by no means weakened the devotion of the Marquis de St. Angel. She still turned an unseeing eye and a deaf ear toward him, although her heart beat wildly and her pulses were racing. One person profited by this — François. He could get sup-

per at any time out of the Marquis by merely telling about Diane, and especially of the notes and letters she received, and even the presents which she haughtily returned. The Marquis continued to pursue her and to damn her for an affected prude and subtle advertiser, and not half as handsome as a plenty of other ladies in her profession who were not so obdurate.

Grandin at first bitterly reproached Diane for not encouraging the Marquis and the other young bloods, but in the course of time he came around to her opinion.

"It's much better advertising," said Diane. "If I should go out to supper with one of these young gentlemen, the box office receipts would fall off fifty francs at least. And think, Grandin, how nice it is for you to have all these people following us and looking at you because you are my manager."

"True," replied Grandin. "I have been photographed, actually photographed when I appeared upon the street."

One day in midwinter two great honors were paid the Grandin company of jugglers, acrobats, and singers. A card was brought up to the

little sitting room where Diane and Madame Grandin were making a suit of stage clothes for Grandin, who was not only without his coat, but also *sans-culotte*. It was a beautiful card inscribed Captain, the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, Twenty-fifth Regiment of Chasseurs. The two Grandins and Diane were immediately beside themselves. Diane, who had on a large white apron, took it off and put it on again, frantically, and rushed to the little mirror to tidy her hair when it all came tumbling down her back in a glorious mass. Grandin tore the pinned-up jacket and short trousers off and made a dash for his clothes which Madame Grandin seized and withheld violently, mistaking them in her agitation for the stage clothes. In the midst of the commotion, while the Marquis was cooling his heels in the narrow passage below, François passed him and walked upstairs to the little sitting room.

"He is downstairs!" shrieked Diane incoherently, trying with trembling fingers to put up her rich hair. "He is downstairs, and Jean didn't want us to take this sitting room! F said we didn't need it, and now Madame Gr

din won't give Grandin his trousers, and I don't know what I shall do!"

François, however, with his usual coolness, knew exactly what to do. He thrust Grandin into his own room, threw the scissors and the work things and scraps into Diane's apron, which he gathered up and flung after Grandin, and going to the top of the stairs called out, laughing:

"Come up, my Marquis Egmont of the Holy Angels."

The Marquis walked in smiling, having heard all of the commotion. Madame Grandin greeted him with deep agitation, having never received a marquis before, as indeed, neither had Diane.

Diane's usually pale face was scarlet, and she sat as demurely as a nun on the edge of her chair, with downcast eyes, responding "Yes, m'sieu," and "No, m'sieu" to the Marquis' chaste remarks. François remained so as to keep Madame Grandin and Diane from a total collapse. As he looked at the Marquis it occurred to François that any girl might fall in love with so splendid an exterior. He was certainly the most high-bredlooking man François had ever

seen, not excepting himself. The Marquis undress uniform fitted him to perfection, and showed the supple beauty of his straight and sinewy figure. Then his voice was peculiarly sweet, not big and sonorous like Grandin's, but rather low with a crispness in it like a man accustomed to giving orders.

They talked about nothings, as people do when the ladies of a party are not quite at ease. The Marquis was perfectly at ease, however, and had a laughing devil in his eye which responded promptly to the laughing devil in the eyes of François. Diane's voice was even peculiarly sweet, and it occurred to François that the talk between her and the Marquis was like a duet of birds in spring, or the rich notes of the 'cello blending with the sharp sweetness of the violin. And they were just the right height, and Diane was dark-eyed and black-haired and white-skinned, while the Marquis was chestnut-haired and blond and bronzed.

The Marquis complained gently to Diane that she would never accept his invitations to supper and asked her if she would do him the honor to sup with him that night, when he hoped also

have the company of Monsieur and Madame Grandin and Monsieur le Bourgeois.

"I thank you, no," replied Diane sweetly. "I made a resolution before we came to Bienville not to accept any invitations to supper."

"Oh, Diane!" burst out the excellent and too truthful Madame Grandin, "you did no such thing. You only took the notion after you got here, and besides, you were never asked to supper before by a marquis."

"I made the resolution in my own mind," replied Diane suavely, who had never dreamed of such a thing in her life. "It is most kind of the Marquis, but I can make no exception."

The Marquis protested, backed up not only by Madame Grandin, but by Grandin himself, who was listening attentively at the door behind the Marquis, and put out his head, grimacing and gesticulating wildly in protest to Diane. The Marquis saw it all in the little mirror, and burst out laughing, at which Grandin's head suddenly disappeared. But Diane was relentless, and the Marquis had to leave, asking permission, however, to call again.

"You may call every day," replied Madame

Grandin. "My husband thinks it would be a very good thing for the show to have a marquis attentive to Diane. She is a perfectly good girl, I assure you. We made inquiries about her character before we engaged her."

When the Marquis and François were out in the street and laughing together, François said:

"Beware of Diane! She is the most determined creature I ever saw in my life. If she makes up her mind to marry you, you are lost."

François then walked off, taking his way past the Bishop's palace, a shabby old stone house with wide iron gates before it. The Bishop was just coming out for his daily walk, and François, who was as bold with a bishop as with a rat-catcher, went up and said:

"I perceive your Grace does not recognise me. I am — or I was — François d'Artignac of the Chateau d'Artignac on the upper Loire."

The Bishop, a gentle, unsophisticated man, overflowing with benevolence, shook hands cordially with François, saying:

"Ah, it is a great pleasure to me to meet one of your family, for I and my brother, General Bion, were both born and reared upon that es-

tate where our father and our grandfather and our great-grandfathers for many generations back were laborers. We do not seek to disguise our humble origin, my brother and I. We were always well treated by the family of d'Artignac as far back as we can remember, and I am happy and proud to meet a representative of that family."

The Bishop was now out of the gate, and François and himself were promenading together along the street, one of the best in the little town.

"I remember you and your brother well," answered François. "You were always reading and improving yourselves, and taking all the prizes in the village school."

"We did our best," replied the Bishop modestly. "But I recollect you, the little François, the beautiful boy in dainty clothes, that used to walk in the meadows with a footman behind you, while my brother and I kept the cows. Oh, they were happy days!"

François, by design, led the Bishop directly past the lodgings of the Grandin company, and looking up at the window, saw the noses of Grandin and his wife and Diane glued to the window-

pane. They also passed Jean, who bowed respectfully to the Bishop and then thrust his tongue in his cheek on the sly to François.

Meanwhile François had told a pretty story of his downfall in the world, and his resolute determination to earn a living when he had lost all his property and had been repudiated by his family. He did not mention various little episodes with regard to raising money through means prohibited by the law, drunkenness, and a few other shortcomings. He gave as a reason for his change of name the desire to spare the noble house of d'Artignac the mortification of such a fall.

Directly opposite the Hotel Metropole they met General Bion, a stiff, discerning person, who had a low opinion of his brother the Bishop's insight into human nature.

"Brother," said the Bishop, "here is an old acquaintance of ours in our boyhood. We could not call him a friend, because he was so far above us in position, being of the house of d'Artignac. He has had many misfortunes which give him only greater claim upon us."

General Bion looked suspiciously at François,

with a dim recollection of having heard that François' family had never been proud of him. His greeting, therefore, was rather cool, although being a man of sense he promptly referred to the fact that his father had been a laborer upon the estate of François' father.

"He calls himself Le Bourgeois now, for his stage name," said the good Bishop. "I think he shows a true spirit of Christian humility."

The General made no response to this, which caused the Bishop to show François the greater kindness, asking him to breakfast the next morning, which François promptly accepted.

When François returned to his lodgings, the story of his grandeur had already preceded him, and all his fellow-players, except Jean, were overcome with the magnificence which was being showered upon them. Jean said good-humoredly:

"Now, François, don't play any tricks on the good old Bishop. He is as innocent as a lamb, and it would be a sin to trick him."

François took no offence at this, whatever.

But François was not the only one of them who walked that day with a distinguished person.

In the late afternoon, although the day had grown dark and a brown fog was creeping from the river and the low-lying meadows, Diane went for the walk which she religiously consecrated to her complexion. She took her way past the Bishop's palace through the best quarter of the town, indulging herself in dreams of a time when she would be the mistress of a mansion like the big stone houses, with gardens in front, in which the aristocracy of Bienville resided. Presently she came to the gates of the park, which she entered. It was so quiet and so deserted by the nursemaids and the children because of the damp and the fog, that Diane could think uninterruptedly of the Marquis. The great clumps of evergreen shrubbery loomed large in the dimness of the fog, and the big trees were lost in the mist. Diane entered a little heart-shaped maze of cedars, cut flat, and towering high over her head on each side. Here indeed was solitude; not a sound from the near-by town broke the silence, and the darkness which was not the darkness of night, was like that of another world. She threaded the winding paths quickly and presently found herself

the heart of the maze, and sat down on an iron bench. Then, to shut out the world more completely, that she might think only of the Marquis, she put up her muff to her eyes.

As she sat lost in a delicious reverie, she felt two strong hands taking her own two hands and removing them gently from her face. It was the Marquis, who was so close to her that even in the pearly mist she could distinguish his face. Never had he looked so handsome to Diane. His military cap was set jauntily over his laughing eyes, and his trim, soldierly figure, with his cavalry cloak hanging over one shoulder, was grace itself.

Poor Diane !

Having taken her hands from her face, the Marquis laid his mustache on Diane's red lips in a long and clinging kiss, and then sat down beside her, drawing her trembling and palpitating close to him. It was like a bird in the snare of the fowler.

"I saw you and followed you," he said after a while. "You cannot escape me; but why are you so cruel to me?"

"Because I must be," answered poor Diane,

trembling more and more. "Everybody's past is known some time or other, and when the time comes that the newspaper reporters begin to ask about me, I don't want to have anything ugly in my past."

At this, the Marquis, who knew much about women, laughed.

"That is always the way," he said. "You women think much more of your reputation than you do of your virtue. No woman kills herself because she has yielded to her lover. It is only one of three things that drives her to suicide afterward. The first is the dread of being found out; the second is to be deserted; and the third is starvation. But there is no record of any woman killing herself for the mere loss of her virtue, which shows that modesty is more highly valued than virtue by women themselves. Is that not true?"

Diane looked at him bewildered. Was it true?

"All I know is," she said obstinately, "that I don't intend there shall be anything in my past that anybody can twit me about. I would rather die. You may call it either modesty or virtue, but it is stronger with me than life or death."

The Marquis looked at her curiously, and saw in her eyes that peculiar, deadly obstinacy and resolution which was Diane's strongest characteristic.

"I once read in a book," kept on Diane, holding off a little from Egmont, "that the first time a certain royal prince saw Rachel Felix act, he wrote something on a card—I am ashamed to tell you what it was—and sent it to her back of the stage, and she laughed, and invited him to come to see her. If I had been in her place, I would have killed him!"

"Killing is rather difficult for a woman," replied the Marquis, laughing a little uncomfortably.

Diane rose and stood before him, and seemed to grow taller as she spoke.

"God would have shown me the way," she said. "Jael had only a nail, but she killed the enemy of her people, and Judith cut off the head of Holofernes, in his camp, surrounded by his guards."

The light in Diane's eyes startled the Marquis. But it melted into a dovelike softness, when Egmont drew her once more to his side.

"I suppose," he said, "you adorable little devil, that you want to bully me into marrying you?"

"No," answered Diane, "I am so much in love with you that I don't want to bully you into anything; only it is marriage or nothing. I don't know why I say this, or feel this, but I tell you it is as fixed as the stars. You have a power over me so far and no farther."

Diane, as she said this, laid her head contentedly on the Marquis' shoulder, and his lips sought hers.

And so half an hour passed in the reproaches and confessions of the woman who loves and the man who pretends he loves. The mist was growing colder and more dense. It was as if they were alone in a white, mysterious, soundless world inhabited only by themselves.

Presently, as Diane lay on the Marquis' breast, there sounded afar off the faint echo of a church bell from the other world which they had forgotten. At the sound, Diane suddenly and violently wrenched herself from the Marquis' arms and stood upon her feet. Two thoughts raced through her mind, one equally as impor-

tant as the other. The first was the reproach of the church bell that she had allowed the Marquis to kiss her lips and put his arm about her. And the second was the iron discipline of the stage which drags men and women apart when it seems like the tearing of a heart in two; which calls them from death-beds; which makes them report at the theatre when they are more dead than alive.

"There is the cathedral bell," cried Diane in a choking voice, "and it tells me that I have been a wicked girl, and that I may be late for the performance."

The Marquis stood up too, laughing at the jumble of ideas in Diane's mind, but the next moment she was gone, speeding in and out of the maze. In her agitation and the white gloom of the mist she lost her way, and the Marquis, following her, though unable to find her, could hear her sobbing on the other side of the hedge as she ran wildly about trying to find the outlet. At last, however, she escaped and was in the open path running toward the park gates.

The Marquis took his way leisurely after her, not smiling like a successful lover, but grinding

his teeth and cursing both her and himself. Was it possible that this presumptuous, impudent little creature meant to force him to marry her?

Diane got back to her lodging in time for supper with the Grandins, Jean, and François. François amused and delighted them all, telling them of his interview with the Bishop.

"To-morrow," François said, "I shall be breakfasting in distinguished company, with the Bishop. He asked me, and I accepted, you may depend upon it."

"What an advertisement!" cried Grandin, with an eye to business. "If only you could manage to get it into the newspapers!"

"Then he wouldn't be asked to the palace any more," responded the practical Jean. "There is a limit to advertising, Grandin, which you never know."

"We could say," said Grandin, meditating, "that François was passing the Bishop's palace and fell down and hurt himself, and was taken within by the Bishop's servants. Anything will do, just to have it known that François has been at the palace."

"Oh, Grandin!" cried Madame Grandin, "how can you invent such lies?"

They were all so interested in the story of François and his grand acquaintances, that no one except Jean noticed how silent Diane was, and that she ate no supper, although her appetite was usually remarkably good. Jean saw that something had happened, but mindful of that extraordinary loyalty to art of which the theatrical profession is the great model, forebore to ask, lest he should agitate her more.

As Diane and Jean were always partners, they invariably had a love scene in whatever they played together. To-night Diane played the love scene very badly, so badly that the audience noticed it, and she got very little applause. That waked her up, and she picked up her part, as it were, and played it with a renewed spirit that put the audience once more into a good humor with her.

When the performance was over, Diane was a long time in dressing to go home, and the Grandins and François had already gone. Jean, in his shabby, every-day clothes, was waiting for her at the stage entrance.

"I am glad you took yourself by the throat," he said to her grimly, as they picked their way through the mist which still hung over the town, in which the gas lamps made only a little yellow ring. "I thought the scene was gone at one moment, and expected you to be hissed."

"Never!" cried Diane, for once thoroughly frightened. "But Jean, I hate love scenes on the stage."

CHAPTER III

THE SPLENDID EVENTS THAT HAPPENED AT BIENVILLE

THE next day François duly presented himself at the palace at twelve o'clock for breakfast with the Bishop. Much to his disgust, the General was present. François, who loved to fool people, assumed an air and tone of extreme virtue, and again told, with many additions, a pretty story of his reverses and his determination to earn an honest living by doing juggling and acrobating, the only things he knew how to do by which a franc could be earned. The good Bishop was lost in admiration of François, and said :

"That, my dear M. le Bourgeois, as you call yourself, is the highest form of virtue and respectability, is it not, my brother?"

General Bion maintained a stiff silence, which annoyed the good Bishop exceedingly.

The General meant to sit François out, not

doubting that he would contrive to borrow a small sum of money from the Bishop before leaving. But François held his ground, as his ancestors had held theirs on many a hard-fought field, and the General, called away by his military duties, had to leave the wolf in conversation with the lamb. He left a deputy, however, in the person of Mathilde, the Bishop's housekeeper, an angular and ferocious person of sixty, who disapproved of the Bishop's fondness for picking up stray acquaintances and lost dogs and cats and giving them the hospitality of the palace.

When François and the Bishop were left alone in the Bishop's study, then François laid himself out to amuse his host. Soon he had the Bishop roaring with laughter over jokes and merry stories, and at two o'clock it was as much as François could do to tear himself away.

By the time he was out of the room Mathilde had stalked in and proceeded to give the Bishop a piece of her mind.

"Does your Grace remember," she asked wrathfully, "the last adventurer your Grace took up with, who borrowed ninety francs of your Grace and then skipped off to Paris?"

"Yes, my good Mathilde, I know," responded the Bishop, using a soft answer to turn away wrath. "But this gentleman, you see — for he is a gentleman — belongs to a family which were exceedingly kind to my family, and especially my father. He was a laborer upon the estates of this gentleman's father. Think of it!"

"That shows," cried Mathilde, "what a good-for-nothing scamp he must have been. Who ever saw a gentleman standing on his head, like this fellow does, and playing tricks with cards? I kept my hand upon my purse in my pocket all the time I was serving the General and your Grace and this ragamuffin at breakfast."

"Mathilde," said the Bishop, trying to be stern, "I cannot permit you to call a guest in my house a ragamuffin."

"Then," cried Mathilde, "I will give him his right name, and call him a rascal!" And then she flounced out of the room, banging the door after her.

The Bishop sighed. He was a celibate, and yet he was henpecked worse than any man in Bienville.

François, listening outside, walked away

laughing and resolving to pay off Mathilde for knowing the truth about him.

Two days after that, François again met the Bishop face to face in the street in front of the palace, and was warmly greeted. François, eying the clock in the cathedral steeple, saw that it was ten minutes of twelve, and remembering the history of Scheherezade and the Arabian Nights, began telling his crack story to the Bishop. In the midst of it came the bells announcing noon, and the odor of broiled chops from the kitchen window of the old stone house known as the palace. The Bishop, like other men, was subject to temptation, and he could not do without the end of the story, and besides he had always that excellent excuse that his father had been a laborer upon the estates of François' father.

"Come in," said the Bishop, "and have breakfast with me. My brother will not be here."

"Thank God," replied François. "Now, if you could get rid of that old battleaxe of a housekeeper while we are at breakfast, it would be better still."

"That I can't do," said the Bishop ruefully.

"But after all, she is a good creature, and my brother, the General, says it if were not for Mathilde I would never have a sous in my pocket or a coat to my back."

"He is probably right," answered François, taking the Bishop by the arm as they marched up the steps. "It is your cursed good nature that will always be giving you trouble."

François' reception at the hands of Mathilde was a trifle more hostile than before.

There are some tricks of legerdemain which can be played without the aid of a confederate. In the midst of the breakfast, while François was telling some of his best stories, the Bishop inadvertently took his purse from his pocket with his handkerchief, and left the purse lying on the table. When breakfast was over, the purse was missing.

Mathilde assumed an air of triumph, and the Bishop looked very sheepish. At once a search was begun, Mathilde shaking the cloth, looking under the chair occupied by François, and doing everything except rifling his pockets. The purse contained eighty francs, a large sum for the poor Bishop, who lived from hand to mouth.

In the hunt the dining room soon looked as if a cyclone had struck it; drawers were pulled open, chairs knocked about, and Mathilde watched François with a hawk's eye.

"That is a good bit of money to let lie around in the presence of a servant," said François, impudently. "Come now, you woman, haven't you got that purse in your pocket this moment?"

Mathilde, furious, thrust her hand into her own pocket where she carried a handkerchief, a notebook, a large bunch of keys, a prayer-book, a rosary, and a little figure of St. Joseph in a tin case, and her own purse. But what she brought out of her pocket was the Bishop's purse. The Bishop laughed long and loud, and François laughed louder than the Bishop.

After this was over, the Bishop invited François into the study. François, in addition to telling some of his best stories, proceeded to go through some of his most comic antics. The good Bishop laughed until he cried, and excused himself on that ever excellent plea about his father being a laborer on the estates of François' father. Then François went to a wheezy old piano in the room and began to play and sing

some simple old songs of the Bishop's youth — the songs his mother had sung to him in the laborer's cottage in the meadows. Presently the tears were trickling down the Bishop's face.

"Go on, M. le Bourgeois," he said tremulously. "I love those simple old airs that take me back to my childhood when my good mother worked for us all day, and then had the heart to sing to us in the evening. As you sing, I can hear in my heart the tinkling of the cow-bells and the sharp little cries of the birds under the thatched roof — for our roof was only thatch, you remember. Oh, my mother, my dear, dear mother! Her hands were hard with toil, her back was bent with hanging over washing-tubs and the soup pot on the fire; but in Heaven I know she is straight and soft of hand, and one day all her children will surround her and pay her homage as if she, the peasant mother, were a queen!"

François continued to play soft chords, the Bishop listening and sighing and smiling. Presently François heard from the Bishop's big chair a gentle snore. Then François, rising noiselessly, pulled off his own shoes, which were

cracked, and with professional sleight-of-hand took off the Bishop's new shoes, which he put on his own feet, and then slipped his own shoes on the Bishop's feet. There was a desk in the room, and François scribbled on a piece of paper, "I would have taken your Grace's stockings, but they are cotton. If I were a bishop, I would wear silk stockings. I hope your Grace will remedy this impropriety, and in the future wear silk stockings worth the taking." This scrap of paper he pinned to the Bishop's cassock, and went softly out through a door opening on a balcony, from which he swung himself down into the garden. As he walked along, he saw a row of beehives on a bench. Stepping gently, he took off his coat and threw it over a beehive, and then lifting it carried it out into the street. A policeman stopped him, saying:

"What have you got there, my man?"

"A beehive," replied François, "just out of a hothouse, and the bees very active."

The policeman suddenly backed off, and François marched away with his beehive, which he subsequently threw over the stone wall around the Bishop's garden.

Meanwhile the Bishop waked, and reading the piece of paper, looked down at his feet to find full confirmation of François' words. In the midst of it, Mathilde tore into the room.

"Well, your Grace," bawled Mathilde, "what does your Grace think of your rowdy friend now? He stole a beehive off the bench as he went by. Pierre, the cobbler's boy, was passing and saw him and told the cook who told the footman who told me, and I went out, and the beehive is gone! And look at your Grace's feet! The wretch actually stole your Grace's shoes!"

"Why do you speak with such violence?" said the Bishop, loath to lose, for a single pair of shoes and a beehive, the joy of François' company. "Suppose I meet a man whom I have known as a boy, when I was in very humble circumstances and he was very high up in the world, and suppose that man's shoes are worn, and I choose to give him a good pair and take his in return? Is that anybody's business except my own? And suppose I gave him the beehive by way of a joke, you know?"

"It would be exactly like your Grace," snapped Mathilde. "But it was the only good

pair of shoes your Grace had in the world, and I shall have to go out into the town immediately to buy your Grace another pair."

"Do," said the Bishop, delighted to get rid of Mathilde on any terms.

When the door had slammed after the excellent Mathilde, the Bishop drew a long sigh of relief.

"I did not tell a single lie," he said to himself; "I merely stated a hypothetical case. After all, the poor fellow needed the shoes, and he turned it into a pleasantry. I owed him that much for the hearty laughs he gave me, and for singing my mother's old songs to me."

The Bishop was always meeting François in the street after that; it was as if François were lying in wait for him, and by the simple expedient of beginning a good story, or intimating that he had a merry song, just as they reached the gates of the Bishop's palace, François could always get a meal.

The affair of the purse had made Mathilde his mortal enemy, and she complained to the General that the Bishop was giving scandal by having that acrobat and juggler, François

What's-his-name, to breakfast at the palace about three times a week. General Bion, who was punctilious beyond any maiden lady in Bienville, felt it his duty to remonstrate with his brother about having François so often at the palace.

"But, my brother," mildly urged the Bishop, "you would not have me, the son of our father, a laborer, upbish to the son of the Count d'Artignac. And besides, François has a good heart, and I am trying to bring him to penitence and to leave his present uncertain mode of life and to settle down somewhere. I think he is very amenable to grace, and I shall succeed in doing much with him. And then, he sings to me the songs our mother sang — ah, me!"

The General was silenced for the time, but Mathilde gave him privately some valuable information. It was true that whenever she came into the study François was always talking about his soul, and his desire to repent. But as soon as her back was turned she could hear sounds of laughter — François was none too good to be laughing at her — and sometimes she thought she heard the patter of feet, like dancing.

It could not be his Grace. If the General could pay an unexpected call some day after François had breakfasted at the palace —

The General took the hint, and one day when he had seen François going into the palace arm in arm with the Bishop, the General bided his time. When he knew breakfast was over, he unceremoniously opened the door of the Bishop's study. Mathilde was close behind him. There sat the Bishop in his great arm-chair, his hands crossed upon his waistcoat his mouth open as if it were on hinges, while François, in a ballet costume improvised from a table-cloth, was doing a beautiful skirt dance and carolling at the top of his lungs one of the gayest of the music hall songs. The entrance of the General was like a paralytic shock. The Bishop forgot to close his mouth, and François stood with one leg in the air.

"Good morning, brother," said General Bion sarcastically. "So this is bringing M. le Bourgeois to penitence and reforming his wandering life. I am afraid he is laying up material for you as a penitent."

The poor Bishop knew not where to look nor

what to say, but François, with unblushing impudence, ran behind the General, caught Mathilde in his arms, and proceeded to do a high kicking waltz with her, in spite of her screams and protests and fighting like a tiger. Not even the General could stand that with gravity; he laughed in spite of himself. After that day, when François breakfasted at the palace the General had a way of dropping in, and there would be an audience of two instead of one to the antics of François in the good Bishop's study.

Meanwhile, things went on in the lodgings opposite the Hotel Metropole without the slightest change. The Marquis still haunted the place, and Diane still gave him rare interviews in the presence of Madame Grandin. François chaffed her unmercifully about this prudery, but Jean encouraged her.

"Don't let that man see you alone," said Jean sternly to Diane. "A marquis and a cheap music-hall singer is a bad combination."

"It is because you are jealous, Jean," said Diane frankly, at which Jean looked at her with an expression so piteous, so heartrending, in his honest eyes, that even Diane was touched.

One afternoon about three weeks after Diane's adventure in the maze with the Marquis, it was the same sort of an afternoon, the white fog from the river enveloping the town like a muslin veil, and making a mysterious light that was neither day nor night, darkness nor light.

Diane, on going out for her walk, determined to live over that hour of tumultuous joy in the maze, to indulge her imagination in the notion that there she should meet the Marquis. She started out, therefore, tripping lightly along, and made straight for the park. Once more she entered the wide driveway, half veiled in the floating white mist, and with an unerring instinct, she found the opening to the maze. As she walked between the tall, green walls of the clipped cedars, she felt a hand laid on her shoulder, and looking up, there was Egmont, his military cap sitting, as ever, jauntily on his handsome head, his cavalry cloak draped about him like the mantle of a young Greek.

"I caught sight of you as you came out of the house, and I followed you here. Don't you suppose that I have lived over in imagination the half-hour we spent in this place? And then

think how tantalizing it is to sit up in that stuffy room and talk to you across the table in the presence of that silly creature, Madame Grandin."

"She isn't silly, she is one of the best women-jugglers in the profession," answered Diane, loyal and illogical as ever.

There was no resisting him on the part of poor Diane, and presently they were sitting on the bench together, Diane's soft, cool cheek resting against the Marquis' mustache. Presently he said:

"Now, what do you suppose I followed you here for, besides these sweet kisses? Your obstinacy has conquered at last. Will you be my wife, Diane?"

Diane gave a great gasp, and before Egmont knew what she was doing, she had slipped to the damp ground and was kneeling against him, weeping and laughing.

"Do you mean it? Do you really mean it?" she was crying.

"Of course I mean it," said the Marquis, lifting her up once more on the bench beside him. "You are one of those women, Diane, who can make their own terms with men."

"I will never be the least trouble to you," said Diane, still weeping; "I never will be in your way; I will never utter a complaint. I know what it means for you, but I will efface myself. I will go to live in a hovel in the country if you like. All I ask is a little love."

"That you shall have," said the Marquis, kissing her red lips. "Not a little, but an immense deal. And as for living in the country, it is quite true, Diane, that you would be happier and better off living quietly and out of sight for a while, until you learn how to be a marquise. I am thirty years old, and I have no family, so there is no one to protest. The chateau of Egmont is leased, because, to tell you the truth, Diane, I am a poor man. But I have a little shooting-box an hour from Bienville where you could live very comfortably, eh, Diane? A little box of a house with a garden and lilac hedges around it, and a summer-house and some trees and fields and a little river where I often go to fish when I am off duty. Now if you were there — !"

The prospect was so dazzling to Diane that she had to close her eyes to see the splendid vision, and her lips could only whisper:

"A summer-house, a lilac hedge! Oh, glory, glory! One maid will be enough!"

When her first rapture of gratitude and joy was over, Diane, ever practical, said trembling:

"I am willing to live quietly and never to bother you, but I want my people, the Grandins and François and Jean, to know that I am really married to you. I could not live — I could not live, if they don't know it."

"Certainly," answered the Marquis readily. "You see, I really belong in the district where the shooting-box lies. My Colonel will ask me questions, for an officer can't get married on the sly, but trust me to manage that. Let me see, I can get three days' leave three weeks from to-day; this is Saturday. You and I and Madame Grandin can go to the little place and the civil and religious ceremonies can both be performed the same day."

"And M. Grandin and François and Jean can go too?" asked Diane anxiously.

"What's the use?" replied Egmont. "Grandin will be certain to talk too much in that rumbling big voice of his, and create remark. As for François and that great, hulking Jean, I

object to them decidedly. You will need two witnesses. · Madame Grandin is one, and I can find another at my place."

Diane remained silent; a great lump was rising in her throat. But the idea came into her mind, "This is the first thing he has asked me. Shall I refuse him and make it unpleasant for him when he is doing me the greatest honor in the world?"

They remained sitting on the bench and exchanging the sweet nothings of lovers until the faint sound of the church bell again startled Diane, when, as before, she rose and ran panting through the park and along the streets until she reached the lodgings. Once more she found them all at supper, and, as before, she sat pale and silent and eating no supper, but her eyes were glorified. Jean looked at her with a heavy heart; he knew without telling that she had seen the Marquis.

When supper was over, the table cleared away, and they were about starting for the little music hall, Diane, looking about her, said in her most dramatic manner:

"Listen, all of you. I said I knew something

splendid would befall me in Bienville. It has come this afternoon. The Marquis Egmont de St. Angel asked me to marry him, to become his wife, to be a marquise. Oh, how glad I was!"

Madame Grandin clasped Diane in her arms, while Grandin sank on a chair overwhelmed with the magnificence of the thing. Neither Jean nor François spoke.

"I shall maintain a dignified silence with the reporters," said Grandin, "and refuse to say a word upon the subject of whether Diane is to marry the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel or not. But I shall meanwhile write a circumstantial account of everything, mentioning all our names as frequently as possible, and send it to all the Paris newspapers, anonymously of course."

François threw himself back in another chair and laughed uproariously.

"I always said, Skinny," he cried, "that you were the most obstinate, pig-headed, impudent, determined creature that was ever on this planet. Here you have actually bullied a marquis into making you an offer of marriage!"

Jean, almost as pale as Diane, spoke composedly:

"I wish you happiness, Diane," he said. "Now, tell us all about it."

"We are to be married this day three weeks," said Diane. "When I think of it I am so happy I feel as if I could fly. The Marquis has a little shooting-box an hour from here, and we are to drive there, the Marquis and I and Madame Grandin. She will be one of my witnesses, and the Marquis will provide the other. The civil and religious ceremonies will both take place the same day. The Marquis says his colonel will take a hand in the business, but that he can manage that."

A slight chill fell upon all present. Diane, realizing it, blushed and felt every inch a traitor. Then Jean spoke:

"It seems to me, Diane," he said, "that you ought to have some man friend with you, M. Grandin, for example. Not that *I* wish to go. Oh, no, not for a moment!"

As Jean said these words, his strong, clean-shaven face was distorted for an instant. Everybody knew that he least of any one in

the world wished to see Diane married to another man.

"Diane is a quick study," said François, laughing, "but it will take her all of three weeks to learn her part as a marquise. It is the best joke I ever heard — a joke on her, and on my cousin the Marquis, and on all of us!"

"I left it all to him," said Diane, bursting into tears. "I could not find fault with him when he was doing me the greatest honor in the world, and he a marquis. And then," she continued, recovering herself and speaking boldly, "I am as good as twelve men and a boy, anyhow to take care of myself."

"Oh, it's all right," broke in Madame Grandin, cheerfully. "Marquises have their own way of doing things quite different from people like ourselves. The thing is, now, to get some one in Diane's place and rehearse her so she can appear this night three weeks."

At that Diane wept afresh. There was a strange shock in the thought of some one else in her place; she began to realize the tremendous dislocation of her life which was coming. This feeling grew upon her as she entered the little

music hall, and she acted her part with extraordinary power, born of her beating heart, the tension of her soul.

When the performance was over, and she was putting on her hat in the little canvas den, she found herself trembling and weeping a little, and called to Jean in the next den, and he came to her.

"Oh, Jean!" she said, "think, in three weeks it will be the last time that I shall ever step upon the stage again! It will be the last time that I shall ever see those hundreds of eyes full of interest in me, and good will! It will be the last time that I shall make up and wear funny little short skirts, showing my ankles that are so nice! And I do so love to show my ankles! And it will be the last time that I shall ever see any of you as Diane, your fellow-player! After that, I shall be a marquise, the happiest person in the world, no doubt, but I shall never feel quite at ease with any of you again. I shall always be watching and thinking that I am being too kind to you or not kind enough. Oh, Jean!"

And then Diane did a strange thing for the

happiest person in the world; she burst into a passion of tears.

"It's enough to make you cry," answered Jean stolidly. "You are being removed from one world into another. In our stage world everything goes right, and the villain is always punished before the curtain comes down. That's why it is the theatre is a necessity of life; it represents the ideal world where the sinner always repents and is forgiven, and where lovers are always united in the end, and where the scoundrel is paid in full. We, who live in this ideal world, find the real world very dull in comparison."

"That's why, I suppose, I feel so badly about leaving the stage. But I never thought of anything today, when I felt Egmont's arms around me and his lips were upon mine."

Jean gave a strangled cry, and sat down heavily on the box which was the only seat in the little den.

"A man can't stand everything, Diane!" he cried desperately. "In the name of God, don't tell me anything more like that!"

"You mustn't take it so hard, Jean," said

Diane, drying her eyes. "After all, I am only one woman out of millions and millions of them, and you are so nice and so good and act and sing so well, I am sure you could marry some girl much higher up in the profession than I am. And then, everybody has a thorn in the heart. Come, let us start home. The Marquis does not need to dog my steps now."

The Grandins had already left, and Diane walked home between François, who joined them outside, and Jean. François called her *Madame la Marquise*, and made all sorts of good-natured fun of her. Jean was glum and silent.

When the two men parted with Diane on the landing and went up to their garret, their beds separated only with a canvas curtain, François slapped Jean on the back, and said:

"Never mind, old man! It's easy enough to forget a woman."

Jean turned on François a look of contempt.

Jean undressed quickly and laid down upon his hard bed, but not to sleep. He would not give François a chance to gibe at him next day about a sleepless night, and so lay rigidly still in the blackness of the long, low-ceiled garret.

He knew when it was one o'clock by the sound across the street of the closing of the Hotel Metropole, the banging of shutters, and the barring of gates. By some strange psychic intimation he knew that François, although perfectly quiet, was as wide awake as he. Presently, he heard strange sounds from the other side of the canvas partition, something like suppressed sobs and groans. Jean, thinking François was ill, drew aside a corner of the canvas at the end. François was huddled in a heap on the floor, clasping his knees and rocking back and forth, while strangled sobs and smothered cries burst from him. Jean, abashed, returned to his own bed.

The next morning, a bouquet of roses and a little note arrived from the Marquis. This gave unalloyed happiness to two persons — Diane and Grandin.

"A bouquet for a lady in my company from a marquis!" cried Grandin. "It's enough to make a man mad with joy!"

Before breakfast Diane sallied forth, and came back bringing a book on etiquette which she immediately proceeded to study diligently.

When they all assembled for the twelve o'clock dinner, Diane could scarcely be torn away from her book.

"You see," she said to the assembled table, "I have got to learn how to behave like a marquise — and all in three weeks."

"*You* behave like a marquise!" said Jean, somewhat rudely, and laughing. "You will be about as comfortable as a mackerel in a gravel walk! Excuse me, Diane."

"Yes, I will excuse you," said Diane, serenely. "You have been so good to me for so long, and now I have but eighteen more performances with you."

Her lips trembled a little at this, but she quickly resumed :

"The book says that a girl must never see her fiancé alone, and a fiancé should not call oftener than twice a week. That I shall arrange, and Madame Grandin will stay with me."

At this, even Jean laughed.

"How about your trousseau, my dear?" asked François, "especially your court costumes?"

"That will have to come later," replied Diane. "I shall be so busy seeing the Marquis, and studying up this book, and trying to help you with the new girl that I sha'n't have time to get a regular trousseau. Besides, I don't want to spend as much as three hundred and four francs, which I have now, in a hurry. It is a great deal of money, and I must think over it and look well about before I spend it. I have my nice white muslin trimmed with lace at fifteen sous the yard, and I can wash and iron it so beautifully it will look like new. I shall be obliged to buy a wedding veil and wreath, but, by looking around a little, I think I can get one for five or six francs. How amusing it will be when I am a marquise thinking about these things!"

Grandin set on foot plans to secure a young lady in Diane's place. In this, he was immediately rewarded, and succeeded in getting Mademoiselle Rose le Roi, as she called herself, a strapping young woman, blonde and beautiful, and as tall as Jean, and exactly the opposite of Diane in every respect. In this, lay a pain new and sharp for Diane. She had hoped that

Mademoiselle le Roi would prove excessively stupid. On the contrary, the young woman turned out to be very bright.

No one knows the meaning of pain who has not suffered jealousy. The iron entered into Diane's soul when she overheard Grandin saying to his wife that the new girl would soon be as good an actress as Diane, and was much handsomer, which was the truth. And everybody was so taken up with rehearsing Mademoiselle Rose; Diane felt herself already thrust out from that ideal world of the stage which to her was the real world. True, the anticipated joy of being married to the man she adored lost none of its delicious charm, its soft seductiveness, but with it was mingled much real suffering, and a strange and awful dislocation of life.

In those three weeks, Diane was so torn by powerful emotions of all sorts, love, pain, grief, jealousy, fear, triumph, and a thousand other minor things, that she neither ate nor slept, and grew even thinner than ever. And Mademoiselle Rose was so fresh and fair! Nevertheless, Diane's acting did not suffer. On the

contrary, like the poor princess who had burning needles in her shoes, Diane was keyed up to do better work than ever in her life. Never had been her comedy so good. Off the stage, she had no more humor than a cat ; on the stage, she could throw an audience into spasms of merriment. Her voice, too, had in it a celestial thrill that made her little songs move to laughter or bring to tears as never before.

The Marquis was often at the music hall in those evenings, and Diane unconsciously played directly at him.

Every night, as she made up before her little scrap of a mirror in the canvas den, she would think to herself, as a condemned person thinks of the day of execution :

"There are but ten more nights for me."

And the next night :

"There are but nine left."

As to the Marquis' visits, which Diane rigidly fixed at two a week, and had her own way about it, as she always did, they, like everything else in the extraordinary time, were full of joy and pain. First, was the joy of being with him, of hearing his delightful voice, and seeing him

in his beautiful uniform, and the stupendous triumph of it all to her.

At these visits, Madame Grandin, frightened half to death, was always present. Diane invariably rose in a stately manner at the end of half an hour — her book of etiquette prescribed that — and the Marquis, acting just as the book said all fiancés should, complained bitterly of being turned out, and promised reprisals.

It was a strange time to all who were drawn within the whirlpool of emotion that dashed them around in a circle of agitation, stunned and amazed them, made them to be envied and pitied, and in short, as François said, they were exhibited as the puppets of the great God.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDAL VEIL

THE Grandins were perfectly satisfied with Mademoiselle Rose, to Diane's infinite chagrin. This reconciled them to Diane's marriage, which, of course, overwhelmed them with its splendor. Grandin let his imagination loose, and told so many lies about the Marquis' shooting-box, which was magnified first into a large country house, then into a chateau, and finally into a mediæval castle, that he really came to believe the story himself. In vain Madame Grandin corrected him and pointed out amiably that he was lying. But Madame Grandin herself grew capable of believing anything when she saw a real, live marquis sitting in a chair discussing wedding plans with Diane.

Jean Leroux plodded about in the daytime, and at night, like Diane, would say to himself:

"There are but ten more nights; there are but nine more nights."

Alas, like her, the storm and stress of feeling improved his acting. He conceived a hatred of the innocent and buxom Rose le Roi, and began to dread the idea of making stage love to her. Being an honest fellow, however, he kept this to himself, although in his own mind he called the tall, handsome Rose a great bouncing lummux, and about as impressionable as a Normandy heifer.

François was the only one of them who behaved unconcernedly, or who laughed during those three weeks. He chaffed Diane remorselessly, but always with good nature, and offered to provide her with a pedigree as long as that of the Marquis, and advised her to return to what he declared was the original spelling of her name, D'Orian, and boldly proclaim herself a scion of that noble house. The family, he declared, antedated the Cæsars, and was founded shortly after Romulus and Remus, and asserted that the planet Aurania was named for Diane's ancestors. At these jokes, all would once have laughed; now, nobody thought them amusing except François himself.

François breakfasted with the Bishop several

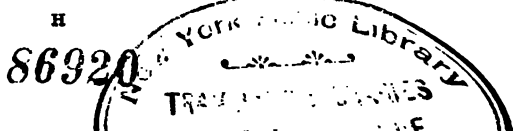
times in those tumultuous days, and on every occasion, as Mathilde sardonically remarked to the Bishop, something mysteriously disappeared. A handsome muffler of the Bishop's apparently evaporated, also an excellent umbrella, and several other useful trifles.

"But," said the Bishop, boldly, to Mathilde, "suppose I gave that scarf to M. le Bourgeois? I never liked it. And as for the umbrella — well, it stood in the anteroom and may have disappeared in any one of a hundred ways, and an umbrella is like innocence — once lost, it is never recovered. Why are you so suspicious, Mathilde? And besides, do you think I can forget that my father was a laborer on the estates of —"

"So your Grace has told me a thousand times," rudely interrupted Mathilde, flinging out of the room.

The Bishop winked softly to himself; as usual, he had merely suggested a hypothetical case. He knew as well as Mathilde where the scarf and the umbrella and the rest of the things went.

Even the General succumbed to François'



charms to the extent of ten francs which François asked as a temporary assistance.

"Because," as François said, "you know the proverb — 'God is omnipotent, but money is His first lieutenant.' Virtue cannot secure a man from poverty — else, would I be lending money instead of borrowing it."

General Bion promptly handed out the ten francs, and as promptly put it down in his notebook under the head of "Charity."

The Bishop, by way of excusing himself for listening to François' songs and jokes and watching his delicious antics, began to urge François quite seriously to repent and confess. At this François balked.

"If I should do that, your Grace," he said, "I would commit the only one of the sins in the calendar of which I have not had experience; this is hypocrisy. I don't repent of anything I ever did except one thing. The other sins I repented when I was caught."

"François," cried the Bishop, scandalized, "after what you have admitted to me that you have done! And what, pray, is the only sin that troubles your conscience?"

"Once," said François, "I saw a young lady, an actress now in our company, who is soon to be married, dressing in her dressing-room at the theatre, and I looked at her in her unsunned loveliness for about two seconds. I am very sorry for that."

"It was indeed wicked, gross, beyond words," said the Bishop. "But there are other wicked things."

"The others," said François, grinning, "were merely sins against myself. I think I have been remarkably free from injuring other persons."

The Bishop could not concede this, and delivered a long lecture to François. In return for it, François did some of his best stunts with only the Bishop as audience, and then going to the wheezy old piano played and sang some of the old songs which always made the tears rain upon the Bishop's gentle face.

On the Thursday night was Diane's last performance, as it was desired that Mademoiselle Rose should make her début before the Saturday night, when they always had the biggest audience of the week.

No prisoner dressing for the guillotine ever

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felt more acutely that he was crossing the bridge between two worlds than did Diane on the Thursday night. That night she would dwell for the last time in the world where lovers were always true and the villain was always punished in public. Beyond, in the other world, lay Paradise, but it was unfamiliar. That day she had seen the Marquis for the last time until she and Madame Grandin were to step in the carriage which the Marquis was to send for them on the Saturday morning, and go out to the village near the shooting-box where the wedding was to take place in the village church. Diane had begged the Marquis to remain away from the music hall that night. She said to him in Madame Grandin's presence:

"If I see you, and even think you are in the audience, I shall break down; I can never go through my part, and I shall be forever disgraced."

"How ridiculous!" cried the Marquis, laughing. "What difference can it make to you now that you are to become the Marquise Egmont de St. Angel?"

Diane made no reply; she could not make

any one understand, who had not lived in the ideal world, what it meant to disgrace one's self in public by breaking down. Madame Grandin said, however:

"That is true. But how can a marquis understand common people like you and me, Diane?"

Everything was ready; the white muslin, nicely washed and ironed, was in Diane's chest of drawers. The wedding veil and wreath of orange blossoms, which had cost all of ten francs, lay on top of the wedding gown, carefully wrapped in tissue paper. That wedding veil was floating before Diane's eyes just as a poor mortal, leaving this world which he loves and all the people in it, sees the silvery cloud that masks the gates of pearl leading to Paradise. All the time, whether on the stage or off, she was saying to herself:

"It is the last time, the last, the last, the last."

And all the others said the same:

"It is the last time, Diane."

The Grandins drove a knife into Diane's heart by adding:

"But we expect to do just as well with Made-moiselle Rose."

Even Jean, the taciturn, said:

"Think of it, Diane, after to-night we shall never act together any more! To-morrow you will be a different person, and Saturday you will have a different name and be living in a different world."

"But I will never change, Jean, while I live," cried Diane, tremulously. "I will always run to meet you when you come to see me."

They were both off the stage for two minutes while they were speaking.

"But I sha'n't come to see you," said Jean. "Good night will be good-by for me."

François' reminders were totally different.

"I sha'n't expect to be noticed by you after you are a marquise," he said. "My family is not as ancient as that of the Egmont de St. Angel, although we are related, and my ancestors fought with Philippe le Bel. But the Marquis' family were ennobled before mine, and as for you — good God! we are all parvenus when compared with the D'Orian family, going back to Romulus and Remus."

This made Diane laugh a little, but it did

not loosen the clutch of something like the hand of fate upon her heart, and she frankly burst out crying when François added:

"Nobody will ever dare to call you Skinny again."

Diane, when she wiped the grease paint off that night, washed her face with her tears.

Madame Grandin suggested that she leave her make-up and little mirror for Mademoiselle Rose, as they represented several francs, but Diane would neither give them nor sell them to her successor, and jealously carried every scrap of her belongings back to her lodging.

All night she lay in her little white bed staring at the winter sky through the window, and at a mocking, grinning moon that obstinately refused to leave the sky until day was breaking, a pallid, wet, and dreary day. As soon as it was light, Diane slipped out of bed and went to the chest of drawers and took a look at the wedding veil and wreath. It seemed to her as if she had spent a night of agony, and that the sight of that veil and the memory of Egmont's kisses were all that could solace the strange passion of regret that possessed her.

Diane contrived to busy herself the whole morning through. It did not take her long to pack up her small wardrobe, but she could not persuade herself to sit down in splendid idleness like a true marquise, but went to work in the kitchen, cleaning out presses and boxes, anything, in short, to keep her at work. Even that was the last time she would have the privilege of cleaning up a kitchen.

The Grandins were very much taken up with Mademoiselle Rose at the music hall, and Jean and François were assisting in rehearsing the newcomer.

At the midday dinner Mademoiselle Rose was present, and received, so Diane thought in the bitterness of her heart, entirely too much attention. In the midst of the dinner a magnificent bouquet for Diane arrived from the Marquis with a letter sealed with a crest. It seemed to Diane during that meal that the storm of conflicting emotions reached its height; she felt herself to be the most triumphant and the most humiliated of women, the most reluctant and the most eager of brides, wretched beyond words, elated beyond expression, miserable, happy, and utterly bewildered.

In the afternoon a fog came up, cold and white, and Diane was thinking of once more going to the park and seeking in the maze of clipped cedars the spot where she had known a tumult of joy. As she stood looking out of the window of her little room, an omnibus passed and stopped. From it descended a lady and a little girl who came straight to the door and pulled the bell. Steps were heard ascending the stairs, and a knock came at Diane's door. When she opened it, the lady—for she was unmistakably that, in spite of the shabbiness of her attire—walked in unceremoniously, holding by the hand the little girl, and, turning, locked and bolted the door behind her. Then, throwing back her veil, she said in a smooth and composed voice:

“This, I believe is Mademoiselle Diane Dorian?”

Diane bowed, and her quick eye took in the appearance of her guest. She was a woman of thirty, and had once been pretty and even now was interesting, but sallow and thin like a person recovering from an illness. The little girl, too, who was about six years old, was as

pale as a snowdrop, and sank rather than sat upon a little stool, leaning her head against her mother's knee, who sat down at once.

"Pray excuse me," said the newcomer, "but I am very tired with travelling, and I am not strong."

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Diane with ready sympathy, and advancing as if to take the child's hand.

The visitor held up one hand and put the other around the child as if to ward off Diane.

"Wait," she said, "let me tell you who I am. I am the wife of the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, and this is his child. Here is my wedding ring."

She drew off a small and shabby glove, and handed a plain gold ring to Diane. Inside of it was clearly legible, "F. E. de St. A. and E. F." with a date seven years back. Then the wife of the Marquis de St. Angel took from her breast a large locket containing three miniatures painted on the same piece of ivory. One face was her own, another was that of Egmont de St. Angel, and the third was the baby face of the little child. On the back were engraved their names.

Diane handed both the ring and the locket back to the wife of the man she loved, and stood motionless for a moment. Then she reeled and fell upon the bed. The silence in the room was unbroken for five minutes except for the coughing of the pale little child. But Diane had not a drop of coward's blood in her body. At the end of five minutes she rose, and, drawing up a chair, said:

"Tell me all about it, please."

"We were married," said the wife of Egmont, "seven years ago in Algeria, where my husband was stationed. We disagreed as a husband and wife will disagree when the husband learns to hate the wife and forgets his child. I was willing to remain in Algeria in a very quiet, small place suited to my limited means, and the climate was good for my child, Claire. The Marquis, you know, is head over ears in debt, so it was easier for me in my position to be poor in Algeria than in France. I called myself Madame Egmont. He often proposed a divorce, and I as often refused and offered to return to France, although I did not wish to come, because it suited me in every way to

remain in Algeria. Some weeks ago I heard that he professed to have got a divorce from me, and would marry a music-hall singer. I came home at once. But I was ill on the way and could not travel for a few days after landing. I found out, no matter how, that you were the woman he proposed to marry. I found out, also, that his conduct in other ways has been such that he will soon be dismissed from the army, so that I suppose he was willing to take desperate chances, for he is a desperate man, you may believe."

"I do believe," answered Diane. "And I promise you that I will see him but once again, and that is tomorrow morning when he comes to take me away — but he will not take me."

The two women talked in an ordinary key and with strange calmness.

"How could you fail to suspect the Marquis?" said Madame Egmont. "Have you no friends to advise you?"

"Oh, I have very good friends. But we are very humble people — except one of us — and we don't understand great people."

"I shall remain here," said Madame Egmont,

"in this town for some days, until I can see my husband's colonel — I want to save the name my child bears. Besides, I am not really able to travel —"

She rose as she spoke, and then, suddenly turning an ashy white, fell over in a dead faint in Diane's arms. Diane, who was strong and supple despite her slimness, carried Madame Egmont like a child and laid her on the bed, Diane's own bed, and loosened her clothes and did promptly what is to be done for a woman in a faint. The frightened child began to cry, and the sound seemed to bring back Madame Egmont's wandering consciousness. Diane picked up the child and placed her on the bed, and then ran and fetched a glass of wine for Madame Egmont.

"If I had a bit of bread," she whispered.

A light broke upon Diane's mind. She ran back into the little kitchen, started up the fire, and put some broth on it to warm; then rummaging in the cupboard she found some milk which she heated, too.

In ten minutes she walked in the room with a tray. Madame Egmont, sitting up in the little

bed, ate her broth and bread, while Diane fed the child sitting in her lap. Then laying the little girl in the bed by the side of her mother, Diane took out a fresh night-dress, and going up to Madame Egmont proceeded unceremoniously to undress her.

"What do you mean?" asked Madame Egmont, weak and bewildered.

"I mean," said Diane, "that neither you nor this child are in any condition to leave this house to-night, and that you are to sleep in my bed, and I will make a comfortable place on the sofa with pillows for Claire, and you shall stay here, and I will take care of you until you are able to leave — for you are the best friend I ever had in my life."

Madame Egmont suddenly put down her spoon, and covering her face with her hands, burst into wild weeping, crying meanwhile:

"I thought that you would not care, that you would have my husband on any terms, and now —"

"The broth is getting cold, and the child is getting frightened," interrupted Diane with

authority. "Now pray behave yourself, and stop crying, and let me put the child to bed."

Madame Egmont did not stop crying at once, but Diane, drawing up the sofa to the other side of the bed, proceeded to make with pillows and covers ruthlessly taken from Madame Grandin's stores, a comfortable little nest for the child. She then proceeded to put a dressing-sack of her own on the little Claire, by way of a night-dress, and bundled her up in bed, where she gave her more hot milk. Next, she started to make a fire in the little fireplace. The wood was sullen, however, and would not go off at once. Diane, opening the drawer in the bureau, took out the wedding veil and wreath, and thrusting them into the fireplace, a cheerful, ruddy blaze sprang up immediately. Madame Egmont laughed softly at Diane's action.

Kindness and warmth and food worked a miracle in Madame Egmont and the child. Madame Egmont lay in bed, calm and resigned; she was a feeble creature physically, not strong and robust like Diane, and the limit of her struggles was reached for the time.

As for the little girl, she lay quite happy and peaceful and dozed off into a soft sleep.

"Now," said Diane, "you shall stay here as long as you wish. I claim one more interview with your husband at which I shall treat him not as a fine lady like you would treat him, but as an honest girl, a music-hall singer, would. I promise you I shall make him sad and sorry."

Something like the ghost of a smile came to the pale lips of Madame Egmont at this frank admission of the social gulf between them.

"I am going out now," said Diane, "but I will come back at seven o'clock and bring you a good supper, and make you both comfortable for the night."

Madame Egmont held out her arms.

"I can't kiss you," she said, "because I know my husband has kissed you, but you may kiss my child."

The two women looking into each other's eyes understood perfectly; Madame Egmont, in giving Diane permission to press her fresh, red lips to the cheek of the little snowdrop of a child, was being accorded the greatest honor that one woman may accord another.

"I thank you," said Diane, "from the bottom of my heart," as she kneeled by the sofa and took the child in her arms and kissed her.

It was five o'clock, and the fog was increasing every moment, but something stronger than herself drove Diane at full speed toward the maze in the dusky park. She did not want to face the Grandins and François and Jean, and especially Mademoiselle Rose, until she was obliged to do so.

At supper, which was at six o'clock, the party missed Diane. As it was the first night of Mademoiselle Rose's appearance, they were all rather hurried, and made no search for Diane, expecting her to appear at every moment. Just as they were about to rise from the table, Diane walked in. Her face was flushed, her eyes brilliant. She had to make a terrible confession, but, with the undying instinct of an actress, she meant to do it in the most dramatic manner possible.

"Listen, all of you," she said; "the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel is a scoundrel, a criminal. He has already a wife and child that are now in this house. Just wait until to-morrow morn-

ing when he comes to take me to the village that we may be married — Ha, ha !”

Her laugh, studied and rippling like an actress’s, made Jean’s blood run cold.

“Ask me no questions, and I will tell you no lies,” she added. No one spoke, except Madame Grandin, who, after a gasp, said that it was well Diane had found it out in time.

Mademoiselle Rose looked a trifle uneasy. She thought that Diane might want her old place back again. Diane knew this by clair-voyance.

“Don’t be alarmed, Mademoiselle,” said Diane, who considered the innocent Rose as her worst enemy next the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel.

“I can get an engagement in Paris without the slightest difficulty. When you come back from the theatre, Grandin, please to go to your room the other way, because I shall have to sleep on the sofa here to-night. The wife and child of the Marquis are in my room. Tomorrow I shall be gone.”

They all were stunned and dazed, but governed by the iron discipline of the stage which re-

quired them in five minutes to be in their canvas dressing-rooms, rose to go.

"I always told you I was ashamed to own the Marquis as a cousin," said François after a moment.

"But the advertisement is not utterly lost," bellowed Grandin. "I only hope Mademoiselle Rose will have an adventure with a marquis."

"Oh," cried Madame Grandin, reproachfully, to her husband, "you always think of advertising first! Well, Diane expected something great to happen at Bienville, and I am sure something great *has* happened."

Only Jean lingered a moment as he passed Diane, his strong face working in agitation.

"I will kill him, Diane!" he said.

"Oh, no!" cried Diane, catching him by the sleeve, "that would be doing him a service. And besides, it would cost your life. No, leave him to me; I will do much worse than kill him."

Jean went out, and Diane, taking off her hat and cloak, busied herself with arranging a little supper on a tray for Madame Egmont and the child. She took it in, stirred up the fire once

more, and lighted a softly shaded lamp. Madame Egmont made no fresh protests of gratitude, but her eyes were eloquent, and the little girl clung to Diane. Warmth and food and attendance were luxuries to the wife and child of the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel.

The next morning at ten o'clock a handsome livery carriage drove up to the door, and the Marquis in ordinary morning dress got out and came upstairs. He knocked gayly at the door of the little sitting-room, and Diane's clear voice called out:

"Come in."

The Marquis entered, and, instead of seeing Diane in bridal array, found her wearing her ordinary black morning gown, and sitting by the table with a basket of stockings before her which she was darning industriously. He started in surprise, and said:

"What is the meaning of this, Diane? I have come for you and Madame Grandin."

"I am not going to be married today," responded Diane, coolly, holding up a stocking to the light and clipping a thread; "I have changed my mind."

The Marquis stood in stunned surprise for a few moments, then gradually an angry flush overspread his handsome face, and he shouted:

"What do you mean? This is the most extraordinary conduct I have ever known."

"Not half as extraordinary as yours," answered Diane, still darning away diligently.

"I demand an explanation," replied the Marquis, violently. "I do not choose to be treated in this manner."

Diane finished a pair of stockings, smoothed them out, rolled them up carefully, laid her sewing implements in the basket, and taking from her pocket the locket of the Marquis and his wife and child, showed it to him.

The face of Egmont de St. Angel changed to a deadly pallor.

"That woman," he said, "was my wife, but she disappeared in Algeria, and I have not seen her or heard of her for seven years, so that I have a legal right to presume that she is dead."

"Oh, what a terrible lie you are telling!" answered Diane. "You have heard from her in the last year, but you thought she was out of

the way in Algeria. And I don't think now that you ever really meant to marry me."

Here was the chance of the Marquis. He smiled and answered:

"Well, I was doing you a great honor in taking up with you on any terms."

He had remained standing, and Diane rose, too, and went toward the bedroom door of Madame Grandin. She opened it suddenly, and Madame Grandin, who had been on her knees listening at the keyhole, tumbled into the room, but speedily got up on her feet. Behind her were Grandin, François, and Jean.

Then Diane turned, and, walking back to the Marquis, lifted up her strong, young hand and gave him a terrible blow on the cheek.

The Marquis, stunned with surprise, staggered back, then, recovering himself, advanced with his fist uplifted. The gaze of the man and woman met, hate and fury in the eyes of the Marquis, fury and hate in those of Diane.

Meanwhile, the Grandins, François, and Jean had all burst into a concerted stage laugh.

"Come now, my dear Marquis of the Holy Angels!" cried François; "you haven't done the

handsome thing, I must say, and this young lady has served you right."

Jean said nothing at all, but making a lunge toward the Marquis, collared him and threw him on the floor. Then with his knee on the Marquis's chest, Jean thumped and pounded his enemy.

Diane stood by, laughing and clapping her hands. The Marquis was a strong and lithe young man, but Jean, a maniac in his rage, was a match for two of him. In the end he had to be dragged off the Marquis, who tottered to his feet, wiped the blood off his face, and made some vague threats. But he was evidently in the house of his enemies.

"You shall pay for this, every one of you!" he shouted; "I will call you all as witnesses to this assault."

"Do!" cried François; "I will go before the police and swear that you struck this young lady and were threatening to kill her, and were only prevented by Jean Leroux holding you, and that you have made threats against the lives of all of us. Of course, the whole affair will come before your colonel, and then we shall see what we shall

see. And by the way, don't ask me to supper with you any more, for I wouldn't be seen with a low dog like you. And in particular, I disown you as a relative."

There was nothing for it but for the Marquis to leave. He got downstairs as best he could, limping, with no look whatever of a bridegroom, slipped into the carriage, and was driven away.

Jean then went to wash off the stains of his encounter, and Diane disappeared.

François ran off to tell the story to the good Bishop, who dearly loved gossip.

When they met for dinner at noon, Diane was not present, but on the table lay a letter addressed to Madame Grandin. It read:

"Dear Madame Grandin: I thank you and Monsieur Grandin for all your kindness to me, and I thank François for teaching me to act, and Jean for teaching me to sing and being always good to me. I don't know how I can live without all of you, but I cannot face you after what has happened. I shall be far away when you read this. Take care of the lady and the little girl in my room until they are able to go away. You will find one hundred and

fifty-two francs in the cupboard in the kitchen, and I want you to use that for them and buy a plenty of milk for the little child. Don't tell them where it comes from; I think they are very badly off for money. Oh, Madame Grandin ! truly, there is a thorn in every heart, but — ”

Here the sheet was blotted apparently with tears, but at the bottom was scribbled the signature, “Diane Dorian.”

CHAPTER V

THE DELUGE

ONE brilliant afternoon in July, five years later, all Paris went crazy. Vast multitudes surged through the streets cheering, laughing, shouting, singing, for were not the days of glory to be repeated? War was declared on Prussia, and, after more than fifty years, the eagles of France were to take their majestic course across the Rhine; again the soldiers of France were to bivouac in every capital in Europe, for once started upon the path of conquest, France has ever been impossible to stop, so thought everybody in Paris that July day.

The streets were like great rivers of humanity, with wild whirlpools and clamoring cataracts, all drifting toward the ocean, and that ocean was the Palace of the Tuilleries. Bands rent the air with the Marseillaise, the great battle hymn of liberty. Often wrested to unworthy purposes, often sung and played by those who hate liberty and love anarchy, the mighty hymn

ever remained the battle-cry of those who would be free. Troops were marching along, splendid hussars and chasseurs trotting gayly through the sunlit streets, steady, red-legged infantry swinging along to their barracks, Zouaves in baggy trousers and hanging caps sauntered and swaggered. Officers clattered along joyously as they made a brilliant streak of color in the great river of men and women. Everywhere a uniform was seen a ringing cheer went up from men and women, young and old, palpitating with pride and joy in these men called to repeat the glories of their ancestors. As the Emperor had said, whatever road they took across the frontier they would find glorious traces of their fathers. Wherever the French had crossed in days past, they had left a trail of glory behind them.

Many groups of soldiers loitered along the streets, or stopped to laugh and joke on the street corners. Men clapped them on the back, and handsome young women smiled and waved their hands at them, and gray-haired grandmothers blessed them. Great ladies in their carriages stopped and laughed and talked with

private soldiers; even the beggars forgot to beg, and hobnobbed with everybody. A beggar was as good as the best, provided only he were French.

All was sunshine, a splendor of hope, magnificence, joy. Once more France would "gird her beauteous limbs with steel," and smite with her mailed hand those who would oppress her.

What were her resources? Every man who could carry a musket. What was her matériel? All the iron, all the steel, all the lead, all the gunpowder in France. What were her soldiers? Heroes, backed up by all her old men, her children, her maidens, and her matrons.

The crowd was most dense in the splendid open space before the Tuilleries gardens, and extended for a long distance on either side of the palace. The air was drenched with perfume from the gardens; the river ran red like wine, in the old Homeric phrase; the windows of the palace blazed in the afternoon light. On a balcony occasionally appeared the Emperor, who bore the magic name of Napoleon, the Empress, a dream of smiling beauty, and the

Prince Imperial, a mere lad, but who was to go out on the firing line along with the veterans.

All the gorgeous carriages and all the graceful horsemen and horsewomen that were usually found at that hour on the Bois de Boulogne formed a great procession moving at a snail's pace, and often stopped by the congestion in the broad Rue de Rivoli and all the fine streets adjacent.

From many points could be seen the Place Vendôme with the great column made from captured Prussian guns surmounted by the statue of the immortal man who made Europe tremble at his nod.

The police were good-natured, the crowd was amiable; there was tremendous excitement, but no disorder. At the slightest incident, multitudes burst into cheering. The ladies sitting back in their victorias clapped their delicate, gloved hands and waved their filmy handkerchiefs, laughing at the soldiers who paid them bold compliments ten inches away from their faces. The cavaliers and ladies on horseback exchanged patriotic chaff with those who surged about them.

Among the crowd directly in front of the

Tuilleries was Jean Leroux, not the Jean Leroux of that winter in Bienville five years before, but another Jean, well dressed, well mannered, successful, but modest withal.

As the carriages moved slowly past, going a few feet and then stopping, blockaded by the crowd, a pretty victoria, well horsed, came directly abreast of Jean Leroux. In it sat Diane, whom he had often seen on the stage in those five years, but to whom he had never had the courage to speak; for if Jean was successful, Diane was a hundred times more so. She was on that day the most popular music-hall artist in Paris. Like Jean, she was Diane and yet not Diane. Her beautiful, mysterious dark eyes were unchanged, her frank, sweet smile was the same, but she was Mademoiselle Dorian, not merely Diane, or worse still, Skinny; that expressed it all. She had eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; she knew the great, ugly, beautiful, laughing, weeping, snarling, generous, wicked, pious world; she was able to take care of herself; she could stand upon her feet and look the ferocious human race in the eye as Una faced the lion.

She wore a charming white gown and a lovely flower-crowned hat, and carried a tiny white lace parasol as if she were accustomed to lace parasols. Her white kid gloves were dainty, and a great bunch of white and crimson roses combined with the blue cornflower made a tricolor in her lap, while on her breast was pinned a tricolor rosette.

As her carriage stopped, the crowd recognized her, and a huge shout went up:

“La Dorian ! La Dorian !”

Diane was used to this cry. She bowed and smiled prettily, like the experienced actress she was, but that was not what the crowd wanted.

“Sing us La Marseillaise !” they shouted; “you can sing it as no one else can ! Sing it, sing it to us !”

Diane stood up in the carriage holding her tricolor bouquet, and a great roar of cheering a thousand times greater than she had ever heard before, stormed the air. Diane stood erect, with her head thrown back.

At last there was silence, and Diane, pointing with her white gloved hand straight at Jean

not ten feet away, cried in her clear, practised, penetrating voice:

"There is a man who can sing *La Marseillaise* better than I can. Bring him here, and make him sing it, too."

The crowd, cheering and laughing, immediately seized Jean, and, in spite of his modest protests, hurled him into the carriage, where he sat down protesting and embarrassed. While the multitude was quieting down, Diane and he exchanged a few words.

"Why haven't you been to see me in all these years?" said Diane.

"Because you were too grand," said Jean. "I didn't want to thrust myself upon a great artist. You might have thought that I wanted you to do something for me, or to get me an engagement. But I have often gone to the music-halls to hear you."

"You were always a goose about some things, Jean Leroux!" was Diane's reply.

And then the silence was complete, and the multitudes that packed the streets a mile on either hand waited to hear the first word of the hymn of battle.

As Diane stood up in the carriage, her slim figure grew taller, and her blood turned to fire in her veins; her voice cleft the air like a silver trumpet, sweet and penetrating, and vibrant with patriotic passion. When she proclaimed,

“The day of glory has arrived!”

the effect was like Jeanne d’Arc striking her spear upon her shield. Then came the great refrain,

“Aux armes! Aux armes!”

One voice arose — the voices of tens of thousands, united in one vast ringing call to victory, one great demand for the rights of man, one last appeal to the God of Battles. The mighty echo rose from earth to heaven; it seemed for a time to fill the universe, and then to leave the universe listening for it.

The chorus ceased — a chorus greater than ever mortal ear had heard since first the men of Marseilles marched to the thunder of their battle hymn — and Jean Leroux stood up and sang the second verse. His was the voice of a man ready to march and to fight. The artist’s soul within Diane quivered as she heard Jean’s splendid basso like the tones of the organ of

Notre Dame pealing out. Again the refrain was thundered from the multitudes that filled miles of streets, and the sound seemed to shake the towers of the Tuilleries palace. Then it was Diane's turn to sing the third verse. The nation that produced Jeanne d'Arc respects the patriotism of its women; they are as ready to die for their country as are the men. At the lines,

"Great God! By these our fettered hands,
Our brows beneath the open yoke,"

Diane lifted her eyes to Heaven, and raised her clasped hands above her head. It was like Charlotte Corday demanding God's blessing, while she armed to do Him service by killing the enemy of His children. Again did the voice of the people make the splendid refrain sound like a great Amen. Men were weeping and clasping each other in their arms. Women with upraised hands prayed for France. The meanest and lowest among them were made respectable by love of country. Never again were any of those who heard the song of the nation sung on that July afternoon, to hear it so sung. They knew it not, but it was for them the last triumphant singing of the hymn of triumph.

Diane and Jean sang the hymn through to the end. Then Jean, looking at Diane, saw that she was as pale as death, and she was trembling like an aspen leaf, while floods of tears ran down her cheeks. He spoke to a policeman at the carriage wheel.

"Get us out of here as quickly as you can. This has been too much for Mademoiselle Dorian."

A couple of brawny policemen, recovering their senses a little, got the horses out of the line, forced back the crowd, and the carriage rattled down one of the small streets leading toward the Champs-Élysées.

"Home," said Jean to the coachman.

He thought the sooner Diane was in some quiet spot the better. He had no idea where she lived.

The horses trotted briskly along, the coachman avoiding the great, thronged thoroughfares. As they drove along, Diane's composure gradually returned. The color came back to her lips and cheeks, and her tremors stopped.

"It was enough to shake anybody," said Jean ;
"I, myself, felt as weak as a cat when I sat down.

We have never in our lives heard anything like that. It has not been heard since before Waterloo."

Diane said little except some murmured reproaches to Jean for not coming to see her.

"All of you forgot me," she said. "I suppose it was because that tall, red-cheeked, awkward creature who took my place, absorbed you so there was no place even in your memories for me."

Jean smiled. This was the same Diane.

"No," he said, "your going seemed to finish up everything. Mademoiselle Rose was not a success. The public did not like her."

Diane gave a little gasp of vindictive joy.

"That was bad, of course, for the Grandins," continued Jean, "particularly as they lost François the same night they lost you."

"How?"

"God knows. After the performance, when François acted miserably, and was hissed and hit on the head by a cabbage thrown at him — and he deserved it for his bad acting, and nearly breaking Madame Grandin's neck in his acrobatic turn — he disappeared. Grandin owed

him some money, too. All we could ever find out was, that François was seen during the night on board the old boat, tied up on the riverside. The police saw a man with a lantern moving about the boat. They went on board, and found it was François, and they drove him off. Oddly enough, not two hours later, there was a fire on the dock, and the wind blew the sparks to the boat, and it was burned to the water's edge. You may imagine, with you and François gone, and Mademoiselle Rose a flat failure, and the boat burned up, it was pretty serious for Grandin. They had a little money, you know, and so they gave up the show business and went to a little town in the French Alps and took to raising chickens. It was as if, with your going, the old life and everything melted away like a dream."

"And then, what did you do?"

"Oh, I got an engagement in the Bienville theatre that took me through the season. I got on very well, and in two years I came to Paris."

"And how about that scamp, the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel?" asked Diane in a perfectly natural voice.

"I didn't like to mention him," answered

Jean; "I thought you might — perhaps — well, I —"

"You needn't mind," promptly responded Diane; "I was a great fool, of course, but no more so than any other inexperienced girl in my position. I thought I loved him. I know now that he was nothing more than a peg to hang my emotions on. It sounded so grand to be a marquise!"

She laughed so naturally and unaffectedly, that a great load was lifted from Jean's heart. The Marquis was rightly appraised by Diane, and she had no regrets for such a scoundrel. Then she kept on, still laughing:

"I should have been perfectly ridiculous as a marquise!"

"He was kicked out of the army," said Jean.

"Served him right," replied Diane, vigorously. "One thing rejoices me — that awful whack I let him have in the face, and I shall always love you, Jean, for the beating you gave him. He deserved it all for his treatment of his wife and child. What became of the poor lady?"

"She went to the Marquis' colonel and told him the whole story. The Marquis made a

stiff fight because he had powerful family connections, but they got rid of him. It was really true, though, that he meant to marry you and commit bigamy."

"Oh, Jean," cried Diane with the deepest feeling, "how often have I thought of poor François' saying, that God takes care of women and fools and drunken people! If I had married the Marquis, I should have killed him, certainly."

"But tell me," said Jean, "how did you get up in the world so quickly?"

"Because I am a woman and a fool," answered Diane with great simplicity. "I had a hundred and fifty-two francs —"

"After you had given half you had to the other woman," interjected Jean.

"And I travelled third class to Paris. On the train I bought a newspaper and looked out for all the advertisements of singing teachers whose terms were reasonable. I found one in a musician and his wife. They took me to live in their house for what board I could pay. The singing master said at once that I had a better voice than I supposed, and he got me into the chorus at the Opera. That paid me something, and I

worked, I can tell you, at my singing. The first engagement I had was at a cheap place on the other side of the river, but I went on steadily, earning more money and more people knowing me. I didn't visit Bohemia, nor go out to supper, nor do any of those crazy things that ruin the voice. I think my singing teacher valued my voice above my soul, but at all events, the time came when I was able to pay him well for his trouble, and began to lay up something comfortable for myself. And here I am."

"And buy diamonds," suggested Jean. "I saw you blazing with them."

Diane laughed scornfully.

"No you didn't," she said. "They were pure paste. I am not half such a fool in some ways as you think. But why, why didn't you come to see me? How could you look at me when I was singing and not think enough of the old days to seek me out?"

"Because you were too grand," replied Jean. "I took the paste things for real diamonds."

Presently they reached in a quiet street a small, pretty house with a charming little garden.

Jean was surprised; he expected to find something much grander, and plainly said so.

"No indeed," answered Diane, dismissing the coachman and showing Jean the way through the drawing-room by glass doors down the steps into the pretty garden. "I think I am of a saving turn. I know what very few singers do, and that is, one day my voice will be gone, so I am saving my money now, that I may be able to live here always, and have you to tea with me in the summer afternoons. I always knew I would see you, Jean, and tell you this."

Jean scowled fiercely at Diane. She was making fun of him and his honest and modest love, but he did not think she ought to say such things to any man. So he declined to notice Diane's speech. When they took their seats on the iron chairs in the garden before the little tea-table, Diane continued her confidences:

"When the foolish men would send me diamonds, I would coolly exchange them for paste and pocket the difference. No indeed, I have heard of music-hall artists with a great many diamonds who were sold out by their creditors."

Jean looked at Diane with admiration.

"I didn't think you had so much sense, Diane," he said.

Then the maid brought the tea, and they sat in the sunny garden until the purple dusk came and a new moon smiled at them from a sky half ruby and half sapphire.

They talked much of the coming war. Jean, who was a capital shot, was to join the franc-tiers.

"I could not keep on singing, you know, when I could be potting the Prussians."

"As for me," replied Diane, "I shall keep on singing as a patriotic duty. These Parisians look upon their theatres and operas and music-halls as a barometer. As long as these are open and we sing and dance and play for this great tyrant, Paris, so long will she believe that all is going well, but let us once stop, and she will become panic-stricken. However, I expect to sing before our Emperor in Berlin next season."

This seemed quite natural and reasonable to Jean, and Diane, laughing, but wholly in earnest, promised him an engagement to sing with her.

"For you know, Jean, you would have been just as high up as I am, except that I had more

impudence. Now that you have had your tea, come into the drawing-room and let us sing together some of the old songs and do some of the old tricks. I have a companion who can thump the piano a little for us."

Diane ran into the drawing-room, called for her companion, a decorous and withered person, Madame Dupin, who sat down to the piano and managed the accompaniment while Diane and Jean sang some of the old songs together with immense spirit. Then Diane proposed to do their singing act together, which meant a love scene and a quarrel that had always brought down the house in the cheap music-hall in Bienville. Jean remembered it well enough — only too well. The memory of the pangs he suffered when Diane, after she met the Marquis, would hold away from him and would not throw herself into his arms as a real actress should, was vivid and painful. But in the pretty drawing-room with Madame Dupin playing away at the piano, Diane hurled herself into Jean's arms and acted as if inspired. When the quarrel came, it was acted so naturally that Diane's manservant, who was peeping through the door,

suddenly rushed in and, seizing Jean by the collar, shouted:

"I will report you to the police for abusing and insulting my lady!"

This amused Diane so much that she threw herself on the sofa convulsed with laughter, and Jean laughed as he had not done since he last saw Diane, while the man-servant, when the circumstances were explained, ran away sheepishly, to be the laughing-stock of his fellow-servants.

It was all so merry and free, and like a last look at a happy past, when before one lies victory, but with it, war and guns and wounds and death.

Jean gave himself barely time to hurry back in a cab to his music-hall, while Diane rushed upstairs to make ready for her own performance.

Great as had been Diane's fame before, it grew greater in those days when France marched forth to conquer Europe again, and was smitten on every hand.

In August and September, when disaster followed disaster, and the universe seemed tumbling to pieces, Diane still sang *La Marseillaise* every night at the music-hall. It seemed to

comfort and put new courage into the hearts of her listeners, mostly striplings and weaklings and old men who could not go to fight the Prussians, and could only hate them from afar. The music-hall did a rushing business; many persons skimped their daily bread to save a couple of francs that would take them into the music-hall where Diane with her glorious singing would reanimate their fainting souls. Not even when the siege began did Diane cease her singing. The prices were then put down, and the hall was not so full, but all came who could.

Jean was gone. He was in the armies that were defeated, or that melted away, or that never existed except on paper. But he was never captured. Two or three times in those frightful months, Diane got a brief line from him. Once he wrote:

“Whom do you think I have seen? François! And François decorated on the field, too! But the next day, he was found dead drunk — he had sold his boots for liquor — so he disappeared. We had some talk, however. He asked about you, and said he always knew Skinny would come into her own. I inquired what he

had been doing for a living in the last five years, and he said he had been picking flowers off century plants for his living. You see, he is the same François, but as brave as if he were honest."

One morning in January, every door and window in Paris was closed and barred. The Prussians were marching in through the Arc de Triomphe, and the gayest city in the world lay as if dead in her grave-clothes on that winter morning. Not a wheel turned in Paris that day; even the dead remained unburied. No theatre or music-hall opened that evening, nor was there a note of music heard in the whole city. Paris was indeed the city of Dreadful Night. Then, after a little breathing spell like that given a man when shackles are put on his feet and handcuffs on his wrists, Paris, the conquered city, sat in her sackcloth bewailing herself for her lost glory. And presently, in her wretchedness and despair, some of her children were turned to devils and fought and mocked her and lacerated her and dragged her shrieking and blood-covered in the mire of disgrace. The frightful orgie of the Commune was an episode in hell for the great,

beautiful, miserable, burning, starving, shrieking city.

Through it all Diane sang, not with the rich, full voice of a well-fed, well-sleeping woman, but with diminished volume and a little off the key; for in those days it was remarked that all voices were raised a semitone higher.

How the months passed when the Commune, that concentration of wickedness, that collection of fiends who sought to murder their country in her hour of misery, few who lived through it could describe; certainly Diane could not. Food and money were scarce enough, though there was not actual starvation as during the siege, but the guns from Montmartre thundered incessantly, and those who were to rescue Paris had to surround her and fight their way inch by inch.

It was in the springtime, and the horse chestnuts in the Champs-Élysées were pushing out their green leaves through their pale pink sheaths, and the insensate sky was blue and gold by day and black and silver by night. From the beginning it was bad enough, but as the sun grew warmer and the days more halcyon in their

beauty, the hell made by men grew worse, the roaring of the guns more constant. The frightful disorders in the streets, murders and horrible orgies, were more frequent. The Commune died hard, as wild boars do. The great city had no defenders within her lines, and lay at the mercy of fiends. The few men who had crept back from the battle-fields could do nothing, and when the Communards in their dirty National Guard uniforms began to be pressed hard and caught in their traps like rats, they began to throw barricades across the streets and fight behind them, wildly and foolishly.

Diane still lived in her small house, although the neighborhood was daily growing more dangerous; the tide of fighting was pouring that way, and the quiet street resounded with the rattle of ammunition wagons and the yells and shouts of drunken National Guards, who were yet not too drunk to fight. The small house remained closed, and the two women within it — Diane and old Marie, a faithful creature whom Diane had picked up some years before — lived in two cellar rooms. There, they were reasonably safe. They dwelt in darkness, because

they had few candles, and would have been afraid to show lights if they could. When the one dim candle was lighted, all windows, doors, cracks, and crannies were tightly closed to give the idea of an uninhabited house. The upstairs had long been dismantled, and there was little there to steal.

In those terrible spring days, neither Diane nor the old woman ever so much as showed themselves in the garden, and only stole forth by night to buy such meagre supplies as they could afford. For Diane was no longer well off. She had given freely of her store to her country, and unless she could once more sing to crowded audiences, she would die as poor as when she first set foot in Paris with her hundred and fifty-two francs in her pocket.

One afternoon in the last of May when the fighting had grown fiercer, the incessant booming of the guns nearer, and the sharp crack of the mitrailleuse louder and more frequent, a great crash resounded in the street before Diane's house. The mob of National Guards had upset a cart-load of stones, and were beginning to tear up the pavement to make one of those simple

but effective barricades that were sometimes better than a good many fortifications. It only took a couple of hours to build this fort in the street, and it was one of the best barricades so built in Paris, because it was directed by a man trained as a soldier, who had once been called the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel. Diane's first view of him after she had slapped his face was as he stood or walked about the narrow street, now crowded and noisy with disorderly National Guards.

The Marquis had changed considerably for the worse in his appearance. Six years before he had been of superb figure and handsome face, and dressed with military elegance. Now, he was red and bloated and slouchy and dirty. His voice had once been sweet and persuasive. Now, it was a bellow of rage and drink, but enough sense was left amid his degradation yet to do some harm to his fellow-men, and the barricade would have been a credit to an engineer.

Many persons had warned Diane to leave her house and seek refuge somewhere else, but this she refused. Now it was too late. For any

woman to show herself was to court death and horrors unspeakable.

Against a house on the opposite side of the street was piled wood enough to start a fire when the Communards were ready, for, if they could no longer defend a point, they set fire to the surrounding buildings. Meanwhile, the real French soldiers rigidly carried out their plan to surround and overwhelm the Communards without destroying the city, and ever the cordon tightened. On this May morning it drew closer around the barricaded spot, and there was fighting in the near-by street. But seeing the danger of fire, the French commander in that quarter played a waiting game.

In the afternoon the day grew dark, and in the evening came a small, fine rain with the darkness. An adventurous young officer tried to carry the barricade under the cover of night, but Colonel Egmont, as the Marquis now called himself, had enough of the devil's wit left in him to drive off the attacking party.

Diane, peering through the chinks of a closed *jalousie*, saw in the darkness the red-legged soldiers retiring, carrying off with them a couple

of dead men and some wounded ones. In the dense shadows, however, two French soldiers remained who were not missed. One was a small man lying flat on his face with a bullet wound through his leg and another in his shoulder. The other was a big man with blood dripping from the back of his neck, who scrambled to his feet and knelt over the little man whose head rested against the tall iron door that led into Diane's garden. In a minute or two the door was softly opened and Diane whispered:

"Come in quickly before you are seen. There is a cellar to the house where you can be safe for a little while, at least."

The big man picked the small man up in his arms and slipped within the garden, Diane softly locking and barring the iron door behind him, and, running around to the back of the house, lifted the lid of a cellar door, showing some narrow stone steps that led down into the black cave of the cellars. As she did this, she recognized Jean in the big man, and François in the small man he was carrying, and Jean recognized her.

François' soul was not in this world at that moment, although it was shortly to return to his body.

Jean and Diane wasted no time in polite inquiries after each other's health.

"Can you carry his legs?" asked Jean in a whisper.

"Yes," replied Diane, slipping down the stairs and taking hold of François' legs, for she could step backward, knowing the stairs well.

The next minute they found themselves in the cellars. There were two small rooms. The windows were tightly closed so that no gleam of light should betray that the place was inhabited. A handful of charcoal burned in a little brazier, for the spring night was sharp and the cellar was cold, and one solitary candle in the outer room merely revealed the gulf of darkness. Huddled over the brazier was the figure of old Marie, the cook; in all cataclysms of one's life, some one is found who is faithful.

There was something like comfort in the place. A carpet was spread upon the stone floor, and a couple of pallets in the inner room accommodated the mistress and the maid. On one of

these they laid François, breathing heavily. Jean stripped off François' shoes, and Diane, producing a pair of scissors, cut away the clothing from his leg below the knee. A horrid wound was spurting blood. Marie ran and fetched some water from a barrel in the corner, and Diane unceremoniously, in the presence of Jean, divested herself of her white cambric petticoat, a thing of filmy ruffles and lace, and tore it into strips to bind up François' wounds. Again, with her deft scissors she cut away a part of his coat and shirt. Old Marie washed the wound in his shoulder, and Jean, with his rude surgery, bound it up with a part of Diane's petticoat. When this was over, François opened his eyes, and looking about him whispered in a weak voice, and with a weak grin:

"I think I must be out of my head still, because I see the face of Diane. Give me something to drink."

Old Marie gave him water which he drank as men do out of whose veins much blood has run, and who are parched with that terrible thirst. Diane, going to a wine rack where there were many long-necked bottles lying head

downward, picked up one and gouged out the cork with her scissors.

Then she poured out in a tin cup some bubbling champagne.

"Is this good for him, do you think?" she asked Jean.

"In the name of God, I do not know," replied Jean, shaking his head.

"But I know," responded the patient in a somewhat stronger voice. "Good champagne will put life into the ribs of death."

Diane knelt down by François and tremblingly gave him the champagne, which he drank, smacking his lips meanwhile.

"I feel like another man," he said, "and that other man wants another swig at the champagne."

But Diane shook her head.

"You can't have any more," she answered.

"And now," said François in a much stronger voice, "I know that I am not wool-gathering, but it is really you, Diane Dorian, otherwise Skinny, because you are so obstinate, just as in the old days."

While Diane was speaking, she noticed that

Jean had sunk on a low bench from which he slipped softly to the floor, his eyes closed and his face gray. Diane ran to him, and catching his head to keep it from striking the floor, found blood upon her hand. Jean's neck was bleeding — François was not the only wounded man.

Diane, with her lately gained experience and assisted by old Marie, turned back Jean's collar and shirt and found there a wound almost as bad as François'. That, too, was washed and bound with strips of Diane's white petticoat, and then Jean came to himself, and asked, as all wounded men do, for water.

"Give him some champagne," said François, feebly, from his pallet.

This Diane did, and then, with Marie's help, laid Jean upon her own pallet.

Then began for the two women a silent vigil that lasted more than a week. They took turns in watching and sleeping. By extreme good fortune both of their patients progressed wonderfully, the wounds healing with the first intention. At the end of the week Jean was able to walk about the inner room, while Fran-

çois, though unable to walk, could sit up in the one chair which the cellars possessed.

Still were darkness and silence maintained within the cellars, although there was noise enough outside. The barricade had become almost a fortress, and as the Communards were hemmed in closer and closer, the barricade was extended. The sound of fighting grew nearer and fiercer, the shouts and cries of men, the rattle of ammunition wagons over the stones, the cracking of the mitrailleuse, the crash of bullets; the beating of the rappel, sounded by night as well as by day.

After night had fallen, old Marie would creep out, and by devious and winding streets would find her way to places where for much money a little coarse food could be bought. There was, however, champagne in plenty, and François had no hesitation in declaring in a whisper that his recovery and that of Jean depended upon the quantity of champagne they drank, and that Diane was delaying their convalescence by not letting them have all they wished.

The hours, instead of being long, were extraor-

dinarily short because there was no sunrise or sunset, no day nor night, only a vivid darkness pierced with the light of a single candle. There was nothing to read by the light of the single candle that burned night and day; there was no conversation above a whisper. Familiarity with danger and long immunity made them all forget their fears, but not their prudence.

Old Marie, who had the tireless industry of her class, managed to keep employed by incessant knitting, after she had done the work of the two cellars. Diane, a worker by nature and habit, put strong compulsion on herself to sit still for hours and hours, her hands in her lap. Jean and François, conquered by their weakness, also remained still and quiet. Through the open door Diane could not see their eyes constantly fixed upon her in the little circle of light made by the one candle. She took them their food, and helped them with all the natural helpfulness of a tender and capable woman. That was her sole employment. She often wished in that strange procession of time which could not be called days or weeks, that she

had fifty wounded men to attend to instead of two.

At last, one night, Jean said to Diane:

"It's time for me to be going. I feel strong enough to carry a musket, and I shall feel stronger still when I get into the fresh air."

Diane said no word; she was the last woman on earth to detain a man from his duty.

François, who was then able to walk about with a stick made from a broom handle, protested in a whisper:

"Who is to chaperon Diane and me," he asked, "when old Marie goes out at night?"

As he spoke, Jean slipped cautiously to the stone steps and lifted up the cellar door about an inch, showing the black night without. A great wave of smoke and an odor of flame rushed in, and through the crack thus made was seen a sky on fire with the luridness of miles of burning buildings. Paris had been set on fire by the Communards.

As Diane, leaning over Jean's shoulder, caught a glimpse of the blazing sky, there was a crash of doors and windows overhead, a trampling of feet, drunken men and women

shouting, laughing, swearing, fighting. In the midst of the uproar they could hear the grand piano, the only piece of furniture left in the house, dragged across the drawing-room floor, and the crash of music as it was pounded to accompany ribald songs. Jean quickly dropped the cellar door. They had no arms except each a pistol out of which their bullets had been fired, and there were no more bullets to be had.

As the drunken crew overhead grew more noisy and numerous, they overflowed into the garden, trampling the neglected flower beds and laughing like demons. Presently they rushed to the cellar door and lifted it up wide. They saw no light within, but a woman's voice shrieked :

"If there is any champagne, it's in the cellar !"

Then a torch was brought, and a man seizing it jumped down the steps holding the torch above his head, and came face to face with Diane. Half a dozen men and women followed him, and, catching sight of the wine bin, flew toward it with shouts of devilish joy, and began to hand out the bottles to those above them.

The man with the torch stuck it into an empty bottle, and the light revealed, not only Diane, but old Marie and Jean and François. The invader wore the uniform of a colonel of the National Guard, and was he who had once been known as the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel.

CHAPTER VI

THE DAY OF GLORY HAS ARRIVED

"WELL now," said he who had once been the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel, but who now called himself Colonel Egmont, addressing Diane, "here I find you, my very proper young lady, in bad company. How long have you been down here living with these two men?"

"Nineteen days," answered Diane, coming a little closer to Egmont and fixing her eyes, sparkling with rage, upon him. "Nineteen days ago these two men came here wounded. I have lived in this place with them ever since — do you understand?"

"Perfectly well," responded Egmont with an elaborate bow. "Now they and you shall share the fate of the enemies of the Commune. Come with me, all of you."

He turned and climbed the narrow stone steps again, followed by Diane and Jean and François and old Marie. The mob in the garden had already begun to drink the champagne,

and they were so keen to get into the cellar that they scarcely allowed their commander to come up with his prisoners.

"Here," said Egmont, calling to some National Guards already drunk and trying to get drunker, "find a cart to take these prisoners to the Mazas prison."

Not the slightest attention was paid to this order until Egmont, drawing his pistol, covered half a dozen National Guards, who then, with champagne bottles tucked under their arms, surrounded Diane and Jean and François. Then Egmont sent one of them to stop a cart rumbling by.

"I can't trust these fellows," said Egmont, stroking his mustache; "I shall have to go with you, myself, to see that you are landed safe in the Mazas just around the corner. As for you, Mademoiselle, do you remember the blow you struck me in the face six years ago?"

"With the greatest pleasure," responded Diane sweetly; "I have never thought of that blow without a thrill of joy."

"Very well," replied Egmont, smiling, "perhaps you have not found out, in your retire-

ment with these gentlemen, what has happened to women who are the enemies of the Commune? Twelve Dominican sisters disappeared a week ago. They have never been heard from, and never will be. Now, I intend to make you pay for that blow, not once, but a thousand times over."

"But you can't deprive me of the satisfaction I have had all these years in the thought that I struck it," was Diane's response, while François remarked:

"I always thought that you, my Marquis of the Holy Angels, were a cad and not a gentleman. Now I know it."

At this, Jean, who had said nothing, cast a warning glance at Diane and François.

"I know what you mean by that look, Jean," said Diane, carefully smoothing her hair. "But prudence is of no use when you are in the tiger's clutch — or rather the rhinoceros — for this fat, ugly creature looks more like a rhinoceros than a tiger. He means to murder us all, and will do it, no matter how polite we might be. Dear me! I really am not properly dressed for a drive through the streets. No hat — no gloves — no parasol."

Jean sighed heavily for her, but François only grinned.

"I declare, Skinny," he said, "I believe you really are a descendant of the Oriani family of ancient Rome. You have such a glorious spirit."

"Oh, no, I am not," answered Diane, with a demure smile. "My father was only the village hatter. Like Napoleon, I am the first of my family."

"Come you," cried Egmont, "and bundle into the cart. I shall go with you for the pleasure of your company."

Then they were all thrown into a cart, and a National Guard, less drunk than the rest, took the reins, while Egmont sat on the tail-board, laughing and jeering at his prisoners.

The night sky was of a frightful crimson, while a gigantic blanket of black smoke many miles in length lay over the city which was blazing on both sides of the river that ran red like blood. On the spot where Diane and Jean had sung *La Marseillaise* ten months before was a great blazing pyre, the Palace of the Tuilleries, and a ring of huge buildings for miles on either

side were sending up enormous masses of smoke and flames. The heat in the May night was terrific, and the smoke was like the smoke of hell.

Jean, who had said nothing, spoke a word to Diane.

"Remember," he said, "we can die but once."

"I know that," responded Diane. "And after all, I have found out one thing before I die, and that is, how much I love you."

Besides the tumult that raged around them, the noise of the heavy-laden cart traversing the streets was great, but Diane, accustomed to raising her voice so it could be heard afar, could yet be heard clearly. She turned toward Jean with ineffable tenderness in her voice and smile, while the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel heard every word.

"I think I always loved you, Jean, but after I came to Paris and saw the other men, and compared them with you, then I fell in love with you. Don't you remember last July, the first time you came to my house with me, what I said to you in the garden? I meant it every word. I want you to love me in the way that I love you."

Egmont, raising his hand, struck Diane's white cheek a hard blow.

"That," he said, "for the blow you gave me and for your boldness, you shameless creature, toward this man."

Jean raised his foot and gave Egmont a kick which knocked him off the tail-board and sent him spinning to the street. He got up and dusted his clothes, and, smiling, climbed back into the cart.

"Wait," he said, "see who wins the game of life and death. As for you, Diane, you shall pay for the kick as well as the slap."

"Really, my dear Marquis of the Holy Angels," said François in his musical drawl, "you make me ashamed of our class. These people are very humble, but their manners are better than yours."

Egmont laughed, and his eyes, filled with the savage joy of a murderer who can murder in safety, were fixed with amused contempt on François.

The noise in the streets grew deafening. The cordon was being tightened every moment around the Communards. They were being

driven in from every quarter, and a great mass of drunken, shrieking, howling, laughing, singing men and women choked the streets.

When the cart reached the prison of the Mazas, the way was blocked by a crowd surrounding a group of drunken women dancing, and shrieking as they danced. As Egmont and his three prisoners got out of the cart, Egmont said to Diane :

"Come now, tuck up your skirts and dance like those ladies."

"No, I thank you," sweetly responded Diane, "I am not a dancer, but a singer, and I am not in good voice to-night."

"Then follow me," said Egmont.

They followed him into the great, gloomy prison, and a jailer led them into a long corridor with iron doors. There were several vacant cells, and in the first one François was thrust. Before the door closed upon him, he caught Diane's hand, and suddenly, without the slightest premonition, burst into passionate weeping. She had seen him always laughing, joking, drinking, fighting, dancing, and singing, but never before, weeping. Even Egmont was

stunned into silence at this strange burst of grief. In a moment or two François had recovered himself, and with an actor's command of countenance, his face suddenly shone with smiles.

"You see, Diane, it's rather hard to say good-by to you after all we have been through together, and then not seeing you for so many years, and being nursed and tended by you in the cellar. I think it's those infernal wounds that have weakened me."

"Why, François," answered Diane, "now I come to think of it, you were always kind to me. You taught me all my stage tricks, and always let me take the curtain calls, and when I was in a hurry to get to the theatre, you often helped me wash the dishes; and when we were living on the boat, you carried many heavy parcels back and forth for me, and had always been good-natured and laughing and joking. After all, whether we are to live or whether we are to die, we shall meet again. Good-by, dear François."

Diane leaned her cheek toward François, who kissed it.

"By the way," said Egmont, himself once more, "an old friend of yours, the Bishop of Bienville, is a fellow-lodger in the same corridor. The old scoundrel got caught in Paris, and we nabbed him as an enemy of the Commune. I think the order for his shooting is already given, but you won't be far behind him, I can promise you."

With that, the jailer thrust François back into a cell, and Egmont marched ahead, his two prisoners in the middle and a couple of armed guards behind.

When they reached a room which Egmont called his quarters, he very politely ushered Diane and Jean into it and closed the door. The armed guards remained outside, but Egmont notified them when he gave two raps on the floor with his heel that they were to enter.

"Now," said he to his prisoners, addressing them both, "this young woman once treated me with great scorn. I tell her, and I tell you, Jean Leroux, that you shall be shot anyhow, and so shall Mademoiselle Diane Dorian, unless she agrees now and here to become my mistress."

Neither Diane nor Jean turned pale. They

had lived through so many horrors in the last frightful ten months, that they had come to regard terrible catastrophies as the every-day incidents of life.

Jean fixed his eyes on Diane, who turned to him with a radiant smile.

"You see, Jean," she said, "how little this wretch knows me! I would rather die ten times over than be his mistress. People are dying all around us all the time, and we shall go anyhow, a little sooner or a little later, and it doesn't matter, particularly as you are to go too."

"Certainly," replied Jean with equal coolness. "You never were a coward, Diane, and most women, I think, would die rather than become this man's mistress. As for myself"—Jean snapped his fingers in the air—"I have been looking death in the eye for ten months. It isn't so bad, I assure you."

Egmont, looking at them, flew into a maniacal rage. He reviled them, using horrible language. He cursed them; he laughed at them like a fiend. His revenge was not complete, because he could not conquer their souls and destroy

their courage as he could kill and mutilate their bodies.

Two raps on the floor brought the guards.

"Take this scoundrel," he said, "and put him in a cell. Lock this woman up. Twenty-four hours will see the end of all of them."

"Have courage, Jean," cried Diane, as she walked away between her jailers. "I promise you to die before I become the mistress of this man or any other man."

The next day at noon a shuffling procession of a jailer and two National Guards opened the door of François' cell, and walked in. The jailer, a good-natured ruffian, read the name and number written on the door, and then said to François:

"You, Jean Leroux, are to be shot at six o'clock this evening."

"All right," answered François, cheerfully. "I ask one thing — I should like to see the Bishop of Bienville, who is in this corridor. He can't help me to escape, he is too fat, but I should like to see him."

There are as many kinds of murderers as there are murders, and the jailer in this case was an amiable murderer.

"I must take you to another cell," he said. "On the way you can stop long enough to make your confession if that is what you want, you superstitious fool, to the fat old fellow from Bienville."

"Thank you very much," answered François; "I thought to myself the first time I saw you yesterday, 'He is an obliging person.'"

"Then come along with me now," said the jailer.

François got up nimbly, in spite of his wounded leg, and followed the guard along the corridor, chatting agreeably with him.

"I swear," said the jailer when they got to the Bishop's door, "I am sorry such a pleasant fellow as you is to be shot."

"If you could only have known me in my past days, and seen some of my juggling tricks and heard me sing, you would be sorrier still," replied François, affably. "You are quite a decent fellow, and if circumstances had permitted, I should have been glad to cultivate your further acquaintance."

The jailer laughed, and unlocking the door of a cell, opened it, saying:

"Half an hour is all I can give you."

François found himself in the cell with the Bishop, and the door locked.

The Bishop was not so stout and ruddy as he had been, but pinched and sallow, for he had been prisoner for a month. He was, however, just as glad to see François, and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Now, your Grace," said François, squatting on the cot, and refusing to take the only chair in the cell, "I have no time to sing the old songs for you. I have only time to do what you often urged me in the old days in Bienville. That is, to confess."

"Heaven be praised!" piously responded the Bishop; "I always told my brother, the General, and Mathilde that you were really an excellent person, and that some day you would become a penitent."

"I have not much time to lose," said François, "as I am to be shot at six o'clock this afternoon. By the way, what has become of the General and Mathilde? I always hated her."

"My brother is in a Prussian prison. Mathilde is, I suppose, still at Bienville. I wish the next

bishop joy of her if he gets her for a house-keeper. For I hardly think that I shall ever leave Paris alive."

"It has indeed become a cursed place," replied François. "I never thought that I should weary of Paris, but I assure your Grace I shall be glad to get out of it on almost any terms, even being shot. But as I have only a half hour in which to confess the sins of thirty years, I think I had better begin."

François went down on his knees, and began a rapid confession of many and grievous sins. The last item was:

"And I propose to tell a lie and to say that I am Jean Leroux, for whom I am mistaken and numbered and put down in a book, and to be shot in the place of Leroux, an excellent fellow and an old comrade of mine, who is loved by a woman whom I love. So I think it is better to tell the lie and to die in the place of Leroux."

The Bishop, who had been leaning back, quietly listening with closed eyes to the most remarkable confession he had ever heard, sat up straight and looked sternly at François.

"I shall not permit it," he said. "It is suicide."

"But your Grace can't help yourself," responded François, still on his knees. "It was told you in confession, and you are not permitted to reveal the secrets of the confessional either to save your own life or anybody else's life."

The Bishop fell back in his chair, his good-natured, sallow, pinched face grown more sallow.

"I can refuse to give you absolution," he said.

"But if a man dies to save the life of another man, he is absolved by his blood," said François, triumphantly. "You see, I am a better theologian than your Grace."

The Bishop leaned forward, and, opening his arms, drew to his breast the kneeling François.

"You will be absolved," he said. "Make a good act of contrition, and pray for me."

The half hour was soon over, but long before that François had finished his confession, and he and the Bishop were chatting together pleasantly, and even laughing.

When the door was opened, and the time came for the last farewell, they kissed each other on the cheek affectionately.

"Thanks for all your kindness," said Fran-

çois, "and make my apologies to Mathilde for all the trouble I gave her. Now, your Grace knows that I am a true penitent."

"I think," replied the Bishop, smiling and blinking, "that I stand no more chance of seeing Mathilde than you. We shall both be called upon to make our apologies to the Most High, shortly. Meanwhile, pray that when my time comes I may be as cool and unconcerned as you. I cannot say that I would wish to live as you have lived, Monsieur François le Bourgeois, as you call yourself, but I would certainly wish to die like you."

"Ah!" cried François, gayly. "Living is much more important than dying. *Au revoir* to your Grace. These Communards are such fools, they won't find out for a week that they got the wrong pig by the ear."

With that, the door closed, and François marched off cheerfully with his jailers to another cell in which he was to spend the three hours of life that remained to him. The cell was much larger and brighter than the one he had left, but cold and damp, in spite of the May heat and the fiercely burning city.

Of this, François complained bitterly.

"What do you mean," he said, "by putting me in this place where I shall be certain to catch cold?"

The jailer, who had a rudimentary sense of humor, grinned at this.

"I have heard a good many condemned persons grumble at their fate, but you are the first one I have seen who is afraid of catching cold three hours before he is introduced to a firing squad."

"My friend," replied François, "I am a gentleman, although somewhat in eclipse, and I want a fire made in this place, because I wish to be comfortable as long as I live."

The jailer, still laughing, opened the door and called to a colleague, who brought a brazier and some charcoal, of which François secured several lumps.

"I feel in the vein for poetry," he said, "and I wish to write some verses on this wall."

While the jailer made a little fire in the brazier, François stood in meditation before the white-washed wall, writing a few words, then rubbing them out with his sleeve, sometimes finishing

a whole line with many corrections, just as poets usually do.

He was so absorbed in his composition that an hour passed, and he was surprised by the jailer bringing in supper at five o'clock. The jailer, who was more and more disposed to be friendly with his prisoner, laughed at the way in which François drew up his stool, surveyed the rude fare, and turned up his nose at it.

In the crises of life, men revert to their original type; so François, who called himself *Le Bourgeois*, suddenly and naturally became an aristocrat, such as he had been thirty years before. He tasted some potatoes, and then eyed them disdainfully.

"It isn't the fare I mind, my good friend," he said to the jailer, "nor yet the austere simplicity with which you serve it, but these potatoes are only half boiled, and will certainly make me ill. You should have some care for the health of your prisoners."

The jailer sat down and laughed with unrestrained enjoyment.

"I swear," he said, "you are such an entertaining fellow, it is a shame you are to be shot this afternoon."

"So do I think," responded François, attacking a morsel of very tough beef, "and I am very much surprised, too; but it is the unexpected, you know, which happens. Life is made up of one infernal blunder after another."

The jailer was so pleased with his prisoner, he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a little flask of brandy.

"Here," he said; "it isn't much, but it is enough for a swig."

"Now, this is the first satisfactory thing I have known you to do since our acquaintance began," said François, putting the flask to his mouth and draining it dry.

"It was not indeed much," he said, "but it was a great deal better than nothing. It will give me inspiration to finish my verses. Excuse me for hurrying through with this luxurious meal. I don't suppose you would serve any better to Lucullus himself."

"There is no person by that name in this prison," replied the jailer with simple good faith, "and the same food is served to all. That poor bishop has evidently been accustomed to a good cook, and prison fare goes hard with him."

The jailer found the conversation of his prisoner so agreeable that he remained until François had finished the beef. The potatoes he refused to touch.

"I am taking a great risk of indigestion in eating this tough meat," he said, "but it would be tempting fate to touch those potatoes."

The jailer went out, repeating that he was sorry that six o'clock would end their acquaintance.

Through the small, heavily barred windows looking westward, François could hear the roar of the battle in the city, the distant, incessant thunder of the guns, and see the great waves of flame and smoke from the burning city drifting slowly in the stagnant air. A dun light that was not day nor night lay over Paris. and, although it was but a little after five o'clock, the white-washed cell was dusky.

François continued cheerfully absorbed in his poetic composition. When he reached the fourth line and made a period, he stood off and read his verses with even more than the average satisfaction of a poet.

"There may be time," he said to himself aloud, "to write another verse, so here goes."

He then began another line, and wrote three and a half lines more. At this point, while François was deeply reflecting on a word, the key was turned in the door which was flung open, and the jailer, with a couple of deputies, was standing outside.

"Very sorry, sir," said the jailer, "but the time is up."

"I can only say," replied François, "that your visit is most inopportune. I am just in the midst of the best line in my poem. Like everything else, the Commune annoys everybody. Seven o'clock for my exit would not have hurt the Commune, and would have enabled me to finish my poem. Listen, and if you have any poetic instinct, you will agree that this is the finest thing since Rouget de Lisle."

The jailer knew no more about Rouget de Lisle than he did about Lucullus, and frankly said so.

"Great poets," complained François, "are as scarce as seventeen-year locusts — and when at last I develop into a great poet, the Commune proceeds to shoot me. If I were a bad poet now, shooting would be too good for me. Listen."

Then standing a little way off, he read his poem with all the force and feeling of an actor. These were the lines — ordinary enough, but François' reading made them respectable :

"We dream a turbid dream, all strife,
Full of sharp pain and ecstasy,
Pale ghosts of Love and Joy we see,
And call our dreaming, Life.

"We waken in the darkling hour,
The last before the dawn appears,
Shuddering, we see the Gate of Tears,
When lo ! Immortal Light —"

"If I had a little more time," said François,
"I could finish the thing."

The jailer and his two deputies had but a dim understanding of François' verses, but his practised and musical voice, his eloquent eyes, made them feel something, and the jailer, who had a streak of humanity in him, suddenly began winking his small, dull eyes.

"Excuse me," said François, putting on his hat, "for wearing my hat in your august presence, but I am determined not to catch cold. And

remember, I am Jean Leroux, the descendant, as the name indicates, of a family of Spanish hidalgos with large possessions in the Philippines."

The jailer knew enough to understand that this was a joke, and he said, trying to laugh:

"Oh, yes, Jean Leroux, I won't forget you, and I shall tell everybody who asks for you, 'That fellow Leroux was a cool hand.'"

The jailer then produced a rope and proceeded to tie François' hands behind his back. He was gentle about it, and asked François if it hurt.

"No," replied François, "but I hope it won't take the skin off."

Then began a march through the dim corridor at the end of which were found half a dozen other unfortunates to be stood up against the wall before a firing squad.

All were calm except an old priest, who said with a tremulous smile to François, standing next him:

"I don't see why I should tremble so, because I am already seventy-seven years old, and could not live much longer."

"Well, then," answered François, "you should not mind a little thing like a bullet, which will send you to heaven."

"True," said the old man, suddenly straightening himself up; "your words are words of wisdom."

"Now," continued François, ranging himself by the side of the old priest as the sombre procession marched two and two down the stone stairs, "I have a great deal to answer for in the next half hour, but, I tell you, I believe God is a good deal easier on His poor children than men are to each other. The devil is a *sans culotte*. I chummed with him, but I never mistook him for a gentleman."

"Really," said the old priest as he clumped feebly down the stairs worn by the feet of many prisoners, "you do for me what I should do for you."

The grewsome procession, headed and flanked and enclosed by guards and jailers, passed through the courtyard until they came to a garden. On one side was a long, lately opened trench.

Around them, afar off, was a gigantic circle of leaping flames. Over them hung the greatest smoke bank the world ever saw, while the stench of powder and blood polluted the soft May air.

The place was full of National Guards, many of them drunk, all of them bewildered, stunned, and terrified by the cordon of fire and steel that was tightening around them every hour. But they were murdering to the last.

When the procession was halted, and the prisoners were stood up against the stone wall of the garden, the officer in command was the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel. He grinned when he saw François.

"Here you are," he said. "Come now, before we spoil your beauty, give us a song and dance."

"My regular price for a performance," said François, "is five hundred francs, and you probably have not that much about you. Besides, although, like you, my Marquis Egmont of the Holy Angels, I have not lived as a gentleman, unlike you, I mean to die as a gentleman."

"Forward!" cried Egmont to the firing squad, which marched out and took their places.

The old priest lifted his bound hands and blessed and absolved them all, prisoners and murderers alike. Egmont laughed loudly at this, but François bent his head. Then he raised it

and fixed his bright, dark eyes full on Egmont. The gaze seemed to fascinate, to accuse, to condemn, and to terrify him. Just then, a sudden, sharp, vagrant wind cleft the dun cloud of smoke, and a ray of pale splendor shone for a moment on the face of François. Egmont, in desperation, to escape the piercing eyes of François, shouted, "Fire!" A straggling volley rang out, and François and the old priest and the other four men fell forward prone to the ground. The little spark of life left their mangled bodies and sped with ever increasing light and glory to the other world.

The bodies were rolled in canvas, and thrown into the trench and hastily covered with earth, but the jailer, who had seen it all, observed that François was laid at the head of the trench.

Then was heard a quick, wild thunder of guns as if coming from the ground under their feet, and from two streets they saw a disorderly multitude of National Guards being driven before two red-legged columns of soldiers. The jailer, who was not without sense, saw that all was over. He ran back to the prison, raced up the stairs, and along the corridor, unlocking every

door. Some of the prisoners, he thought, would save his life for that one act.

When he reached Diane's door, it was the last, and he flung it wide. She was standing calmly in the middle of the cell, and asked:

"Have you come for me?"

"No," replied the jailer. "The soldiers are here; listen to the wheels of the mitrailleuse down in the courtyard. I am trying to turn these prisoners loose before a fire breaks out."

The man's face was deadly pale, and with his hand he wiped drops from his dirty forehead. He had seen enough of the death of others not to like the prospect for himself.

"Such a pity," he mumbled nervously; "not ten minutes ago six prisoners were shot, one of them an old, tottering priest, and another, Jean Leroux, the bravest —"

"Jean Leroux, did you say?" asked Diane, coming up close to him.

"Yes," replied the jailer, "an actor and singer, and Colonel Egmont, as he calls himself now, though he was a marquis the other day, taunted Jean Leroux thirty seconds before he was shot."

"Where is Colonel Egmont, as you call him?" asked Diane, still calmly, and without a tremor in her voice.

"God knows," answered the jailer. "He was in the courtyard a moment ago."

Diane rushed by the jailer, and ran along the corridor, down the stairs, and bareheaded into the courtyard. Egmont was there trying to subdue the panic among his men and to induce them to make a last stand, but no one heeded him. There was running to and fro and throwing down of arms and the steady cracking rifles of skilled soldiers.

Egmont, cursing and swearing, turned, and was faced by Diane.

"So," she said, "you have killed the man I love. Well, then, I can love him just as much dead as when he was living. Did you not know that?"

"I know," responded Egmont, "that women are great fools where men are concerned. I didn't know that Jean Leroux had been shot, but I am glad of it. François le Bourgeois has just been put to sleep."

Behind them a string of prisoners was trooping

out. One of them, a big man, came up and caught Diane around the waist and began dragging her down the steps and into a blind alley that opened upon the courtyard, for bullets were now flying and cracking, and a gun was being trained down either street.

As Diane turned and saw that it was Jean Leroux whose arm was around her, she suddenly became as a dead woman in his arms. She was so slim that it was easy enough for Jean to pick her up and carry her into the blind alley, where he was about to lay her flat upon the cold stones when she revived and stood upon her feet, for Diane was a strong woman and not given to fainting.

"They told me you were shot," she said.

"Not yet," answered Jean. "Come, let us find a cellar. We have been in cellars before, and found them pleasant enough."

The soldiers did not make as short work as they expected of Egmont and his crew. For an hour, Jean and Diane, listening in a black and slimy cellar, heard desperate fighting going on around them, the few wretches who remained dying hard, like wild animals at bay. Half a

dozen smouldering fires were put out in that time, and the soldiers, at their leisure and without burning anything, finally got possession of the prison of the Mazas.

It was black night, but the sky was still illuminated with a dreadful and appalling glory when Diane and Jean finally crept once more into the blind alley. The soldiers were carrying off a badly wounded man, cursing and denouncing all men and their Maker. It was he who was once the Marquis Egmont de St. Angel. The officer in command was surprised, if anything could surprise one in those frightful hours, to see a woman in such a place. Diane showed an admirable calmness, and Jean, as usual, had little to say. The jailer, hovering around and seeing Diane, came up cringing.

"This lady will tell you, sir," he said to the officer, "that I opened the doors of all the cells as soon as I could, fearing a fire."

"True," answered Diane, "but why did you tell me that Jean Leroux was shot?"

"Because he told me so himself," cried the jailer, nervously. "When I showed him the warrant for the shooting of Jean Leroux, he said,

'I am Jean Leroux,' and he told me so a dozen times. The Bishop that was in the prison knows the man who was shot. The Bishop has gone back to his cell, because he has nowhere else to go until to-morrow, and if this officer will let us, I will take you to him."

Ten minutes later, Diane and Jean were in the Bishop's cell, which was lighted only by a lantern carried by the jailer, for prisoners were not allowed lights.

"Will your Grace bear me out," said the jailer, who had decided to recognize the Bishop's dignity, since the Commune was at an end, "that the man who was shot this afternoon gave his name as Jean Leroux?"

"Did he?" cried the Bishop with animation, rising. "Well, then, that man, whatever his name may be, or whatever his life may have been, died nobly."

A silence which the jailer could not understand prevailed in the cell. The two men and the woman looked at each other with a strange understanding and eloquence in the eyes of all.

The jailer, very anxious to make favor for himself, continued:

"If you will come with me to the cell that the dead man occupied, I will show you his handwriting on the wall."

Still silent, the Bishop walking heavily, they went down the corridor, and the jailer opened the door of the cell, large and with many windows, and swung the lantern so that its yellow gleam fell upon the whitewashed wall.

The Bishop read the first two lines, and then his voice broke. Neither Diane nor Jean took up the reading.

The jailer, still obsequious, chattered on.

"He was the coolest hand I ever saw, and making jokes until the very last, complaining that he would catch cold if he didn't wear his hat on the way to be shot. He was very proud of his poetry, and complained only that he had not time to finish the last verse."

The Bishop, a man of simple mind, went down on his knees, and Diane and Jean knelt, too. So did the jailer, who did not mind a little thing like that in order to keep the good-will of his recent prisoners.

The Bishop made a prayer for the soul of

François, known as Le Bourgeois, a prayer that came from the heart of an honest man.

When they rose, Jean said to the Bishop:

"Now we know that François, whom the world reckoned a rascalion, was a better man than most. He stood up against the wall, and was huddled into the trench in my place, not so much for my sake as for this woman, whom, I know now, he loved well."

"Is he then buried in the trench?" asked the Bishop. "He must be taken out this night and given Christian burial."

A heavy silence had fallen over the quarter where lately there had been the shrieking of bullets and the thunder of guns. Still the city was burning and shrouded in smoke, but the Commune was throttled and dead.

In finding François, everything was done quite as informally as shooting him. The Bishop stood by the trench in the darkness, which was lighted only by the jailer's lantern.

The trench was the last one dug by the Communards, and was so hastily filled that the dirt was easily thrown aside by a couple of soldiers hired to do the work, Jean helping with a spade.

They lifted François out, looking strangely young and natural when the canvas in which his body was wrapped was removed.

Diane was a little way off,—it was no sight for a woman,—but at that moment she entered the garden in the dusk, carrying something in her hand.

“Here,” she said, “is something in which to wrap François. I went to the officer commanding at the jail, and told him that François was a soldier of France who had died bravely, and that he was entitled to have the tricolor laid upon him dead.”

It was a small flag, such as batteries of artillery carry in case they should lose or be separated from their colors.

Diane, kneeling on the ground, wrapped François’ body in it, and then leaned over and kissed his dead face.

There was a little half-wrecked church in the neighborhood, and there François was carried by the soldiers, with the jailer and Jean assisting, and followed by the Bishop. They laid him down on the pavement before the desecrated altar, and there Jean watched by him the whole night through.



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